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**Intimacy Between Men in Modern Women's Writing**

**By**

**Elizabeth Woledge**

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of  
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# **Intimacy Between Men in Modern Women's Writing**

**By Elizabeth Woledge**

## **Abstract**

This thesis sets out to investigate, and concludes by defining, a genre of modern women's writing. This genre, which I have called 'intimatopia' for its depiction of fictional worlds which centre around intimacy, explores close relationships between men. I use this thesis to elucidate the ideological assumptions which underlie this genre, as well as to consider the textual features which are commonly used to support them. My investigation is facilitated by my choice to focus on the appropriative fictions which form a significant part of the intimatopic genre. The appropriative text is particularly apposite to any project which, like this one, seeks to investigate distinctive ideologies, for in a comparison between the text and its source the ideological perspectives of the writer can be glimpsed. As a result of this approach one of the central features of this thesis is a comparison between hegemonic and intimatopic ideologies, which are found to be markedly different.

Central to the intimatopic text, which may be sexually explicit, sexually discreet, or sexually ambiguous, is the assumption that there exists a fluid link between love, friendship and intimacy. This ideological perspective is one which many theoreticians, in fields as diverse as literary criticism, psychology and biology, have connected to feminine, rather than masculine, ways of thinking. Although it is therefore unsurprising to find that this is a feature of a predominantly feminine genre, its application to relationships between men runs counter to ideological assumptions about masculine interaction.

From examining a variety of appropriative literature I move on to less overtly appropriative texts in which the by now familiar intimatopic features can be identified. Following this, I discuss the interpretive communities which produce intimatopic texts, using the example of slash fiction, where the interpretive community is readily accessible, I begin to investigate the ideological assumptions about human interaction which underpin the interpretations typical of intimatopic writing. Finally, I consider the genre's

antecedents, and mention other texts which, although they do not take male intimacy as their theme, nonetheless share intimatopic features. Thus this thesis offers an insight into an area of women's writing which has received little critical attention and which I have been able to crystallise into the genre of intimatopia. Whilst it is clearly inaccurate to describe all women's writing as intimatopic, this genre accounts for a significant number of texts by women and should be recognised alongside other 'feminine' genres as part of the varied field of women's literature.

## Introduction

When Elaine Showalter asked in 1981, 'what is *the difference* of women's writing?'<sup>1</sup> she was voicing a question that still provokes debate across the diverse but interconnected fields of literature, history and cultural studies. The majority of academic investigations into the distinctive features of women's writing have taken an overtly feminist approach, tending to focus on what Christian Moraru, for example, saw as the 'saliently political and cultural agenda'<sup>2</sup> of women's work. The feminist focus of such investigations has, no doubt, been partially responsible for the fact that most studies of women's writing have taken for their central theme, as Lynne Pearce's did, not only texts by women, but texts 'about women'.<sup>3</sup> In this respect the feminist approach potentially reduces studies of women's writing to analysis of the ways in which women represent women. Jane Miller's *Women Writing About Men* is one exception to this bias; however, even here, representations of men are explored solely for what they suggest about how men relate to women, as fathers, brothers and sons.<sup>4</sup> Miller's limited focus is possibly a result of her feminist determination to demonstrate how women writers, 'question and challenge men's appropriation of women's experience'.<sup>5</sup> Diana Fuss has warned of the dangers of the sometimes essentialising perspective of feminism which may assume a unity amongst women's aims reflected across the breadth of women's writing.<sup>6</sup> Such

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 179-205 (p.185).

<sup>2</sup> Christian Moraru, *Re-Writing: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p.143. See also, Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997); Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter, (London: Virago, 1986); Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1982); Patrocinio Schweickart, 'Reading Ourselves: Towards a feminist Theory of Reading' in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary And Cultural Studies Forth Edition*, ed. by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleiter (New York: Longman, 1998) pp.197-219; *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. by Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, ed. by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and The Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997), p.66.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Miller, *Women Writing About Men* (London: Virago Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *Women Writing About Men*, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989).

an assumption presupposes a simplistic equation between the female writer and the feminist text, which is directly contradicted by the existence of many texts by women in which neither women themselves nor feminism are of explicit or implicit centrality.<sup>7</sup>

The female writers I have chosen to study here all write about men, focusing not on their relationships to women, but rather on their relationships to one another. Often the worlds they depict are homosocial communities in which women are of little importance having no significant impact on the central characters or plot. For overtly feminist scholars these writers might be considered to have an anti-feminist agenda, their exclusion of women colluding with the worst elements of patriarchy. Such a feeling is expressed by Joanna Russ, who characterises women who use male protagonists to depict homosocial societies as those who ignore ‘the whole experience of female culture,’ and create ‘a world in which women have no consciousness’.<sup>8</sup> Although, as I shall be arguing, a women’s consciousness does not need a fictionally female mouthpiece to find its way into a text, it may be that this kind of opinion has been partially responsible for the lack of critical attention so far given to the body of women’s writing exploring relationships between men. It is easy to see why critics such as Anne Cranny-Francis who focus solely on ‘fiction written from a self consciously feminist perspective’<sup>9</sup> would ignore texts which appear to reject so much of what feminists have worked for. Despite their frequent lack of an overtly feminist perspective, the texts I will be studying here explore, through their investigation of bonds between men, relationships which present possibilities for intimacy unconnected to heterosexual interaction. In this way the texts discussed here move in the direction Tania Modleski longed for when she asked why, although popular texts for women express, ‘dissatisfaction with male-female relationships’

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<sup>7</sup> A similar point is made by Rosalind Coward who notes that though many romantic novels are written by women, few of them could be considered feminist. Rosalind Coward, ‘Are Women’s Novels Feminist Novels?’, in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp.225-239.

<sup>8</sup> Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.85.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.1.

they 'never question the primacy of these relationships'.<sup>10</sup> I shall not however be making a case for the feminist credentials of the texts I investigate, which would be doubtful at best, for I believe, as Showalter does, that the study of the distinctive patterns of women's writing, should remain focused on 'what women actually write, not [...] what women ought to write'.<sup>11</sup>

Like existing research on women's writing, my project inevitably asks certain questions. Is there such a thing as *women's* writing? Do women write differently from men, and if so, in which ways? This is an area in which public and academic opinion are interestingly divergent; popular opinion holds that men and women are intrinsically different, men being from Mars and women from Venus,<sup>12</sup> whilst academic opinion, at least within the domain of literary studies,<sup>13</sup> tends towards the view expressed by Pat Barker, that there is no 'essential difference between men's writing and women's'.<sup>14</sup> In line with prevailing academic trends, Rita Felski argues against the possibility of a unified theory of female or feminist aesthetics from which would spring a unified field of women's writing. Felski insists on scepticism towards 'any claim that women are more likely to write in a particular style because of the existence of a specifically feminine psychology'.<sup>15</sup> However, such a claim will be seen implicitly informing much of my argument as presented in this thesis. Attempts to demonstrate distinctively feminine perspectives have often stumbled over the problem of how a feminine psychology might manifest itself in a text and hence be extracted by the analyst. Several scholars faced with this problem have, like Tania Modleski in her analysis of Romance Fiction, used Freudian or Lacanian techniques in a way which reduces textual analysis to an exposition of the psychoanalytic

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<sup>10</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.113.

<sup>11</sup> Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', p.205.

<sup>12</sup> Title of a popular book on how to understand the opposite sex. John Gray, *Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus: How to Get What You Want in Your Relationships* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Psychologists are much more willing to assert that men and women are basically different. David Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Blake Morrison, 'War Stories: What Booker Prize Winner Pat Barker Sees in Soldiers', *New Yorker*, 22 June 1996, p.80.

<sup>15</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.19.

conflicts supposedly unique to women.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, my approach, though implicitly examining feminine psychology, will begin from textual analysis rather than bringing the psychological analysis to the text. The textual analysis that I undertake will demonstrate that the texts I discuss do in fact reflect interests that several scientifically based psychological papers have suggested are more common to women than men. The minor psychological elements of my conclusions will therefore be derived from scientific, rather than literary critical, approaches to psychology and the textual analysis I undertake will be enabled, not by psychoanalysis, but by my choice to investigate appropriative fictions. These texts, which import one or more of their elements from another source, make the act of interpretation particularly visible. My approach will facilitate the examination of the shared interpretive features of a body of texts emphasising that whilst women are more likely to use certain structures than men, the existence of these structures within a text will not identify that text as conclusively female authored.

The fact that there are overlaps between men's and women's writing is dramatically illustrated by the particular case of the ambiguously named Mel Keegan, whose works I consider in more detail in chapter four. Though actually a woman, Mel Keegan writes as a man for the Gay Men's Press and her books are overtly marketed for the modern male homosexual reader. Keegan's apparent ability to produce 'men's writing' despite her womanhood might lead us to answer Showalter's question, 'what is *the difference* of women's writing' with the suggestion that perhaps there isn't *any* difference at all. In between these polarised positions, one of essentialising women's writing, the other of unifying all writing, I shall suggest that in the case of the texts considered here, women's writing can be linked by the similar strategies it demonstrates in its representation of intimacy between men.<sup>17</sup> Indeed though many readers obviously accept Keegan's texts as male authored, her books share many of the features which distinctively link the other female authored texts discussed here.

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<sup>16</sup> Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance*.

<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I shall define 'intimacy' as familiarity, close association and informal warmth, the kind of unity between two individuals which often characterises close friendship. Although the intimacy explored in these texts may be sexual in nature, I do not use the term 'intimacy' as any kind of euphemism for sexual interaction although this is one of the definitions suggested by the OED.



Rita Felski is concerned by the potential dangers she sees in 'classifying any particular style of writing as uniquely or specifically feminine'.<sup>18</sup> Such is not my aim; instead I aim to elucidate a constellation of strategies, used more frequently in women's texts than men's, and to suggest how they might be informed by cultural aspects of psychology. The styles of writing investigated here may be 'feminine', in that they are frequently used by women, but as I shall demonstrate they are neither 'unique' to women's writing nor 'specific' to women. Although the texts brought together here under the rubric of male intimacy show cohesive patterns, I do not intend to extrapolate from this any claim that these patterns could be seen across all types of women's writing. This approach is consistent with Felski's carefully qualified acknowledgement that it 'has been shown that specific themes and metaphors frequently recur in women's writing within and sometimes across particular cultural traditions' for example the representation of 'internal experience'<sup>19</sup> or 'people and relationships'<sup>20</sup>. I hope that this thesis will provide ample evidence for the recurring 'repertoire of thematic elements and formal features'<sup>21</sup> which Elisabeth Wessling claims define a genre. These thematic elements and formal features connect a body of disparate texts through which women explore intimacy between men, in such a way that these texts may be considered a unified genre of literature the production of which can be connected to culturally induced psychological predispositions which are commonly considered feminine.<sup>22</sup>

As already mentioned one possible way to investigate psychological predispositions in fiction would be to select for analysis texts in which the act of construction is particularly visible. The historical or otherwise appropriative

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<sup>18</sup> Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, p.19

<sup>19</sup> Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, p.26-27

<sup>20</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.213. Fiske does not hesitate to point out the different subjects typically explored by male and female narratives.

<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Wessling, *Writing History As a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 1991), p.96.

<sup>22</sup> That psychology is a result of some indefinable mixture of nature and nurture, biology and culture has long been suggested by psychologists who, like Anastasi, often insist that the balance between biology and context can never be unpicked and that we must simply accept that both in some way have their influence on psychology. Hence a feminine psychology may have some basis in biological differences and also be influenced by the fact that culture shapes men and women in different ways. On the fruitlessness of the nature versus nurture argument see, A. Anastasi, 'Heredity, Environment and the Question "How?"', *Psychological Review*, 65 (1958), 197-208.

novel is just such a visibly constructed text. Although such works used to be dismissed for their supposed lack of originality, ever since Harold Bloom claimed of poetic influence that it 'need not make poets less original' and may even make 'them more original',<sup>23</sup> several scholars have devoted lengthy studies to the nature of appropriative fiction. David Cowart's *Literary Symbiosis* recognises that almost no text is free of influence and that, 'whether the guest author appropriates a character from the host text, extrapolates from its action, or even replicates it word for word, meaning does not remain stable'.<sup>24</sup> It is in these unstable altered meanings that we can gain an insight into the ways in which psychological elements affect the process of textual construction. The difference, or 'liminal space',<sup>25</sup> between the source and the interpretation of that source which the appropriative text exemplifies, provides a place where the 'feminine' psychology of the writer might impinge upon the text, in investigatable ways. The fact that individual perspective affects appropriation and retelling has long been recognised by historians who accept that the way history is retold reveals as much about the perspective of the reteller as it does about the history recounted. Indeed David Lowenthal memorably points out that, 'the past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today's predilections'.<sup>26</sup> The further assumption that gender in particular affects appropriation is supported by evidence from psychological research in which both women and men were asked to retell a short story in their own words. It was found that women, far more than men, were inclined to retell the story in terms of 'interpersonal motives, allegiances, and conflicts'.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that in the texts depicting

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.7.

<sup>24</sup> David Cowart, *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth Century Writing* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), p.15.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p.6.

<sup>26</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. xvii. Lowenthal is far from the only person to make such a claim and others whose texts have something to say on this subject include: David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); Georg Lukács *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1965); Wesseling, *Writing History As a Prophet*; Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> David Bleich, 'Gender Interests in Reading and Language', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp.234- 266 (p.261).

intimate relationships between men brought together here, it is across the spectrum of interpersonal interaction where recurring textual features are most readily identified. Not only the way that retelling is accomplished, but also the choice of source to retell, may provide insight into the predispositions which have shaped the author's predilections and perspectives. With this in mind, Sarah Waters has investigated the ways in which different historical eras had a particular interest in retelling particular homoerotic myths because, 'they seemed so compatible with contemporary homosexual paradigms'.<sup>28</sup> It is frequently these compatibilities, or resonances, that the appropriative texts discussed here latch onto and rework in distinctive ways whose parallelism suggests that the authors are working from a shared perspective derived from the condition of late twentieth and early twenty first century womanhood in the developed world. The authors brought together here are from the relatively diverse cultural backgrounds of America, Britain, South Africa and Australia, and I hope that this international group of westernised women will help to facilitate my investigation into how shared interpretive strategies affect selection, appropriation and retelling.<sup>29</sup>

All of the women brought together in this thesis have chosen to retell specifically male histories. They have either chosen a source which is male authored, for instance Plato's *Symposium*, or they have chosen a source with a particular focus on male orientated societies, such as the trenches of World War One. The many ways in which women retell male histories is a common focus for feminist criticism, which, like Rachel Blau DuPlessis', often highlights the ways in which women retell male stories 'from the other side'.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the writers under investigation here are telling it, at least ostensibly, from the same (male) side. Although, on closer examination, their stories offer alternatives to masculine ideals, in their use of male characters and male narrators, these writers

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Waters, ' "The Most Famous Fairy in History": Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6 (1995), 194-230 (p.229).

<sup>29</sup> A premise for such an approach exists in Salmon and Symons research into slash fiction; they reason that because slash is an international phenomenon it can be used to draw conclusions about shared features of female mating psychology. Catherine Salmon, and Don Symons, 'Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology', *Journal of Sex Research*, 41 (2004) 94-100.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth - Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p.110.

may appear to collude with the patriarchal bias of much historical documentation and literature. Despite their apparent collusion with patriarchy, the writers I study here may in fact share DuPlessis' writer's aims, to 'transform hegemonic society and the tales it tells'.<sup>31</sup> The close examination which follows of the ways in which women are retelling stories both by and about men, offers ample examples of representations which refute the cultural hegemonies surrounding male interaction. In this, rather than in more overt ways, the writers considered here may be seen as retelling male histories in female terms; terms which offer perspectives on intimacy which differ from those more frequently dramatised by patriarchal western culture.

Throughout the various levels of appropriation, in the texts discussed here, men and male societies are being restructured in distinctive ways, ways which are driven by feminine psychologies and shaped by the cultures which have formed them. Although, as Felski points out, one must avoid the temptation to essentialise the category of women and thereby reduce textual meaning to the gender of the author, many academics have set a precedent for viewing women as a diverse cultural group who nonetheless share certain interpretive strategies derived from both psychology and cultural context. Under such a rubric the female authors discussed here might be seen, in Stanley Fish's terms, as an 'interpretive community' within the context of which sources are interpreted, and hence retold, from a feminine perspective.<sup>32</sup> Similar possibilities are offered by both Alan Sinfield and Elaine Showalter. Sinfield suggests that women might be understood as belonging to a 'subculture' which provides them with a 'distinctive framework' for interpretation.<sup>33</sup> Showalter suggests that women's similarities might be understood in terms of the 'forces that intersect an individual woman writer's cultural field'<sup>34</sup> though these forces may differ from woman to woman they are also likely to create common experiential features. Both these approaches highlight how women's and men's cultural contexts differ and how these differences may provide men and women with divergent

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<sup>31</sup> DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.122.

<sup>32</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? An Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). Fish's interpretive communities took account of both individual differences and shared predispositions.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.68.

<sup>34</sup> Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism', p.201.

interpretive strategies or 'frameworks'. Whilst I have chosen to borrow Fish's term, 'interpretive community', as being the most applicable to the kind of analysis of interpretation undertaken here, all three possibilities have the advantage of providing a category to which all women may loosely belong but within which any single woman can retain her individuality; a cultural context, subculture or community may shape women's interpretation but it does not define a woman. To view women as individuals, who exist in disparate contexts but who share common cultural influences, explains why women are likely to make similar textual interventions during appropriation, and avoids essentialising women as a group. This thesis is not in any way making an attempt to understand the whole spectrum of women's writing by extrapolation from the example of a single small genre; instead I am interested in what this genre and its shared features can tell us about the ways in which a group of female writers imagine male intimacies, thus shedding light on a little investigated area of women's writing, and the cultural competencies<sup>35</sup> that inform it.

Although the issue of women writing about male intimacy has been explored with reference to single authors, such as Mary Renault,<sup>36</sup> no work that I am aware of has yet brought together professional authors working within this field and considered their works as a genre. In contrast, since the early 1990s there has been a considerable amount of work done on the amateur women writers who produce 'slash fiction', a genre of media fan fiction which clearly has intersections with the themes of intimacy under investigation here.<sup>37</sup> The genre of slash fiction, which I discuss in more detail in chapter five, involves the appropriation of male heroes from the popular media and the rewriting of the

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<sup>35</sup> The term is used by Janice Radway; although I occasionally refer to her theories throughout I do not subscribe to her belief that readers of popular cultural texts passively accept the coding they contain, never considering that it might be historically or culturally specific. Janice Radway, *Reading The Romance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p.8.

<sup>36</sup> Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions, Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> See chapter five for a detailed investigation of the links between slash fiction and the professional authors considered. The three major works on slash fiction were all published in the early 1990s: Constance Penley, 'Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics and Technology', in *Cultural Politics, Volume 3: Technoculture*, ed. by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp.135-161; Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992); Camille Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

friendship they share in the source material into an erotic relationship. Although slash fiction is frequently explicitly sexual and because of the startling and perhaps subversive nature of women eroticising male bonds, it is this sexualisation that has received the most attention, whilst the crucial structures of intimacy which surround and support it have largely been ignored.<sup>38</sup> It is perhaps this bias towards focusing on sexual aspects that has led to slash fiction being considered in a class of its own rather than as the amateur end of a spectrum of works by women, all of which centre around the notion of male intimacy. That intimacy may take a sexualised erotic form, as it does in slash fiction, but equally well it may not, as is the case in Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting* (see chapter three). Though some of the texts considered here are explicitly sexual, several are not and I hope that an examination of the features they share will be sufficient to explain why it is that I believe they should all be considered as a part of the same genre linked by their shared ideologies.

Lennard Davis suggests that, 'novels do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology,'<sup>39</sup> ideology being the 'governing social, cultural, and especially political ideas'<sup>40</sup> that have become taken for granted knowledge in any given society. As it is formulated by Louis Althusser, we are all 'steeped' in ideology,<sup>41</sup> it pervades our consciousnesses at all levels and hence influences all forms of representation including the appropriative novel. Under Althusser's model the novelist could not avoid indelibly inscribing her novels with the ideologies currently present in her culture and hence her psychology. Alan Sinfield has questioned Althusser's model, asking how it is possible for dissidence to exist if our culture and the individuals within it are governed by such a pervasive ideological structure. He has usefully suggested that perhaps there can be more than one ideology in operation at any given time and that cultural 'conflict and contradiction stem from the very strategies through which

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<sup>38</sup> Andrew Ross, for instance, claims that slash fiction is 'always graphically sexual' which, as I will demonstrate in chapter five, is not the case. Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.156.

<sup>39</sup> Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels* (London: Routledge, 1987), p.24.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Harlow: Pearson and Longman, 2004), p.292.

<sup>41</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), p.128.

dominant ideologies strive to contain the expectations they generate'.<sup>42</sup> In fact Marx's original definition of ideology already envisaged a multitude of ideologies in existence at any one time, insisting that though two individuals may not share the same ideologies they were all affected by some form of ideological structure. Indeed Marx's definition states that ideology is the 'system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of man or a social group',<sup>43</sup> clearly suggesting that social groups and individuals, whilst always governed by some form of ideology, may not share identical ideologies. Thus Althusser's Marxian model of ideology is not as inflexible as Sinfield suggests, and certainly leaves room for the idea that certain interpretive communities or subcultures may share ideologies that differ from those dominating the wider society. One such example of these differences has already been suggested above; whilst dominant ideologies suggest that men and women are almost irreconcilably different, the prevailing ideologies in academic communities in the humanities suggests that the difference between men and women is a difference that makes no difference. Ideologies surrounding sexual intimacy between men, from 'an abomination against nature', to 'a celebration of sexual possibilities' and several positions in between, are rife with contradictions. Just one example of this is encapsulated in the Hollywood buddy movies, which celebrate same sex bonding in a homosocial world but in which homosexuality is either denied or derided.<sup>44</sup> It would not be surprising therefore to discover that certain feminine ideologies provided different perspectives on same sex intimacy from those which are dominant in other subcultures or in the wider society. Indeed such a possibility is hinted at by those individuals who like Bruce Bawer, wondered why, 'the best novel about male homosexuality [...] was written by a woman'<sup>45</sup> and Roger Austen who was annoyed by the fact that 'the best publicised and best selling gay novels of the [1970s] [...] have been penned by women'.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps these female authors are interpreting, and hence representing, male homosexuality and intimacy from an

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<sup>42</sup> Sinfield, *Cultural Politics*, p.25.

<sup>43</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p.149.

<sup>44</sup> Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (London: Harper and Row, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Bawer, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), p.196.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Austen, *Playing the Game: The Homosexual Novel in America* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1977), p.216.

ideological perspective that differs from that more commonly expressed by men.<sup>47</sup>

When discussing the representation of same sex sexual intimacy or 'homosexuality' whether in the past, or in modern texts which depict the past, the question is inevitably raised about the anachronistic use of the term homosexual. Since four of the texts I discuss in detail are set well before the scientific coining of the homosexual in 1868,<sup>48</sup> and others are set well in the future when that term may have become obsolete, it is necessary to briefly consider the limitations and qualifications that this term is used under in my investigation. The debate between the essentialists and constructionists has become polarised around several issues; essentialists might argue that homosexuality, is a result of biological difference, is the same in all individuals and is a trans historical universal phenomenon. By contrast constructionists may argue for some of the opposing positions; that homosexuality is a result of cultural shaping, that homosexuality is different for each individual and that homosexuality is a localised phenomenon arising only in the twentieth century. Clearly it is this last position that is of most relevance to the texts discussed here, many of which represent love and sex between men well before or well after the twentieth century. Since Foucault's influential assertion that the homosexual as 'a species' dated from the coining of the term homosexual,<sup>49</sup> critical debate has been in favour of a constructionist point of view, with a few notable exceptions such as Rictor Norton's *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*.<sup>50</sup> However, it is now considered that Foucault's assertion should not be used to claim that homosexuality did not exist before 1868, merely that the term 'homosexuality' was not used as a way of stigmatising and classifying individuals prior to that date and that in fact there were 'a multiplicity of possible connections between

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<sup>47</sup> For a more detailed discussion of what these differences might be see p.154 - 157, p219

<sup>48</sup> First used scientifically by Wilhelm Griesinger in an article 'On a Little Known Psychopathic Condition'. The term was used prior to this in 1868 in letters from the Hungarian Kertbeny to Ulrichs. Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Picador, 2003), p.55, p.67.

<sup>49</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p.43.

<sup>50</sup> Rictor Norton, *The Myth of The Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997).



sex and identity' already in existence before 1868.<sup>51</sup> What this debate highlights is the need for a clear distinction between homosexual acts and homosexual identities such as the following suggested by Jeffrey Weeks: 'we have to distinguish between homosexual behaviour, which is universal, and a homosexual identity which is historically specific.'<sup>52</sup> With this in mind when I use the term homosexual in this thesis I am at pains to clarify whether I am referring to universal acts or specific identities. Indeed, as my thesis progresses I will use the term less, for it will become increasingly apparent that, though describing same sex love and desire, many of the texts I discuss work away from the term 'homosexual' and all its connotations, towards other definitions of male-male interaction. However the issue of essentialism remains central to my debate, for I will frequently discuss the so called 'resonance' between the writer's ideological perspective and the elements they appropriate. Many of the authors discussed in this thesis implicitly propose an essentialist position which highlights what Mary Renault termed 'universals of human feeling'.<sup>53</sup> It is necessary to distinguish my use of the term resonance from any belief that specific ideologies, or even feelings, are really universal constants. As I perceive it, resonance, results from the way a historical source may interact with modern ideologies, appearing to reference familiar concepts and creating an impression of trans-historical identification. This resonance may exist solely in the mind of the appropriative writer and does not imply an essentialist belief on my part in a common human experience connecting the modern reader to their historical text.

The resonance which characterises interpretation and retelling underpins all the texts discussed here which showcase their careful negotiation between modern ideologies and stereotypes and those imported from the sources that they have appropriated. It has long been recognised that for historical novels 'to communicate convincingly and to invest historical accounts with interpretive

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<sup>51</sup> David M. Halperin, 'Forgetting Foucault: Acts Identities, and the History of Sexuality' *Representations* 63 (1998), 93-120 (p.109).

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, From the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1983), p.3.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Renault, 'History in Fiction' *Times Literary Supplement* 23 March 1973, p.316.

coherence<sup>54</sup> they must use modern patterns of thought and communication. This is no less true for other forms of appropriative fiction which share with the historical novel both the desire to take from their sources enough to flavour their own fictions and the inevitable infusing of these flavours with modern ideologies. For this reason much of what has been said about historical fiction in particular is apposite to the consideration of appropriative fiction in general. It seems that almost every critic who writes about the historical novel notes its combination of historical and contemporary elements; for instance, David Cowart writes of the genre since 1950 that, 'its author probes the past to account for a present that grows increasingly chaotic.'<sup>55</sup> Similarly Moraru suggests that despite distant settings modern historical fiction is really about 'late twentieth century identity, anxieties and prejudices'.<sup>56</sup> Both Cowart's and Moraru's accounts focus on determining whether the appropriative novel tells us more about its source or the moment of its own construction. However this approach is fraught with disagreements and contradictions. In considering historical novels by Mary Renault, Cowart categorises her texts as those which 'aspire purely or largely to historical verisimilitude',<sup>57</sup> and J.Z. Eglinton, the author of the history book *Greek Love*, goes so far as to claim that Renault 'does more than [his] study to illuminate Greek love in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.'<sup>58</sup> In complete contrast Julian Hartt claims that Renault's *The Persian Boy* 'throws a very modest amount of light on Alexander in his own world' and suggests that 'perhaps it throws more on us in ours'.<sup>59</sup> Renault herself felt that, 'the writer who exploits a period setting for propaganda purposes, drawing fallacious parallels with his own society, [...] sacrifices his integrity.'<sup>60</sup> Despite this, her own fiction, no less than the others discussed here, is shaped and coloured by the resonance she found between her Greek sources and the modern ideologies her

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<sup>54</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p.235. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, . whose concept of the necessary anachronism also highlights the necessity for modernisms in historical novels.

<sup>55</sup> David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989). p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Moraru, *Re-Writing*, p.111.

<sup>57</sup> David Cowart *History and the Contemporary Novel*, p.8. For a similar classification theory see, Wesseling, *Writing History As a Prophet*.

<sup>58</sup> J.Z. Eglinton, *Greek Love* (New York: Oliver Layton Press, 1964), p.260.

<sup>59</sup> Julian N. Hartt, 'Two Historical Novels', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 49 (1973), 450-458 (p.454).

<sup>60</sup> Caroline Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault: A Literary Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), p.224.

appropriative strategies reflect. The apparent contradiction between Renault's own philosophy and her texts is not as deep as it may at first seem; for Renault's objection is to those writers who make an overt decision to use the past as a 'safe' background in which to couch their complaint with the present. The fusion I am suggesting, however, is more subtle. The present may enter appropriative texts, not through the writers' conscious rhetoric but, far more insidiously, via the processes of retelling during which the author's ideological perspective inevitably, and perhaps unconsciously, gains access to their texts.

Appropriative fiction is able to exploit both its connection to, and its distance from, its source material. Its connections may provide the characterization elements, plot structures, and mythical backdrops which shape the text in specific ways. Its distance from its source, whether that source is historical documentation or an existing media text, allows the appropriative writer the freedom to explore issues that could not be supported within the original source. Male intimacy and homosexuality are just two examples of things that the source may suggest, but be unable to support, without the creative intervention of appropriation. Although recent theorists have worked 'to dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional discourse'<sup>61</sup> it remains true that the expectations for historical and fictional texts differ in crucial ways. Historical writing or that expected to exist within an already established contextual canon, say that of the *Star Trek* universe, is expected to provide new material only in so far as it can be proved to be consistent with existing material.<sup>62</sup> This fact is illustrated by the writer's guide for potential *Star Trek* novelists, which states that writers must not depict 'any permanent change in the STAR TREK characters' and whatever occurs the 'status quo must be restored at the end'.<sup>63</sup> By contrast however, the appropriative rather than canonical, text whilst exploiting its

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<sup>61</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. x.

<sup>62</sup> The producers of televised *Star Trek* employ a team of people to make sure their stories do not contradict one another and one of the most popular *Star Trek* products is the concordance which is a fictional 'history of the future'. Michael Okuda and Denise Okuda, *Star Trek Chronology: The History of the Future* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993). There are also books, and no doubt fans, dedicated to spotting continuity errors, and so it is that the 'history' of the twenty-third century is as hotly contested as that of the sixteenth.

<sup>63</sup> The writers' guide can be found on-line,  
<<http://www.members.aol.com/pinkworld/trekguid.htm>>

source, is able to go beyond the material offered therein and offer extrapolations that might not be consistent or plausible within the larger context of the original source. For instance the amateur appropriative *Star Trek* writer is able to ignore the official stipulation that canonical texts must not 'suggest anything other than friendship among any of the Enterprise crew members'.<sup>64</sup> Similarly Mary Renault as novelist is able to make extrapolations from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* which although they are neither inaccurate nor implausible would fail to be supported either by the larger body of Plato's works or the wider context of Greek history. Only the appropriative text has the freedom to work in dialogue with its sources in this way and is, as Bakhtin observes, able to 'dialogize' the discourses it uses 'in new contexts' which 'reveal ever newer ways' for them 'to mean'.<sup>65</sup> Free from many of the constraints of historical or canonical writing, the appropriative novel may recontextualise appropriated images into a fictional world which may also avoid the constraints of modern historical reality. For instance Mel Keegan can depict homosexual acts in her fictional world without overtly exploring modern identity politics or addressing the current realities of the AIDS crisis. Mel Keegan is not alone amongst historical and appropriative novelists when she expresses a desire to avoid the historical realities of the 'real world' and 'the environment we are all doomed to inhabit'.<sup>66</sup> It should now be clear however that though the appropriative novel may exist in a space free from the constraints of canonicity and current historical reality it will always be coloured by the ideological perspectives of its author.

### Investigating appropriations

In order to investigate how female writers are working with images of male intimacy, which exist in both the sources and the appropriative fictions which result from them, I shall consider in detail the ways in which intimacy is represented differently in the source and the appropriation. To facilitate this I intend to make a limited use of the theories of encoding and decoding. The idea

<sup>64</sup> The writers' guide, on line, <<http://www.members.aol.com/pinkworld/trekguid.htm>>

<sup>65</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. by M. Holquist and C. Emerson, ed. by M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.76.

<sup>66</sup> From Mel Keegan's website at: [www.dream-craft.com/melkeegan/home1.htm](http://www.dream-craft.com/melkeegan/home1.htm)

of decoding has a long history, its aetiology dating back at least to the 1920s when Saussure's linguistic theories were first being criticised for their assumption that language was constructed via stable units of meaning. Volosinov, who both criticised and built upon Saussure's work, insisted that 'meaning' was 'the effect of interaction between speaker and listener'.<sup>67</sup> In Volosinov's theory communication was achieved not via a stable language system but via a shared context. Though he does not use the word 'decoding' it is readily apparent that the term would fit his suggestion that language, the 'changeable and adaptable sign',<sup>68</sup> must be interpreted, hence decoded, by the listener. If language is decoded by the listener, or reader, then it follows that the speaker or writer might use a form of 'encoding' in order to facilitate communication, presenting the same set of facts differently in differing contexts. Hayden White invokes such an image of encoding when he attempts to analyse the interplay of fact and fiction in historiography. In his theory a set of historical facts may be 'encoded' so as to be identified by the modern reader as a particular story type: romance, comedy, tragedy or satire.<sup>69</sup> Thus encoding refers to the ways in which certain representations are embedded, and decoding to the ways in which those representations and their contexts are interpreted by the reader.

These two elements, encoding and decoding were brought together in the 1980s by the emerging discipline of media studies. Stuart Hall's original paper 'Encoding/Decoding', like Volosinov's theory, rejected the structuralist assumption of fixed meaning and insisted upon acknowledgement that the meaning of language is shaped by the varying contexts of reception. Inspired by research funded by mass media producers, who wanted to be sure that their message was getting across accurately, Hall hypothesised that the reason media messages were not always interpreted as their producers had expected was because 'the codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly

<sup>67</sup> V.N. Volosinov, 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language 1929', trans. and ed. by I.R. Titunik, in collab. with, N.H. Buss, in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Volosinov*, ed. by Pam Morris (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), pp.26-38 (p.35).

<sup>68</sup> V.N. Volosinov, 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language', p.33.

<sup>69</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.109. White sometimes uses the term 'emplotted' as a synonym for encoded.

symmetrical'.<sup>70</sup> That is, the cultural and ideological contexts of the author may not be identical to those of the reader and hence their interpretive assumptions may differ. This is clearly relevant to the case of the appropriative writer who may appear to interpret sources against the narrative grain, or to develop esoteric readings apparently based upon very little evidence. It is clear from research conducted by David Morley that, however apparently aberrant, decoding is never 'arbitrary'.<sup>71</sup> Morley explained this observation by suggesting that encoding constrains decoding, implying that the sometimes unusual decodings to be found in appropriative fiction are the result of an uneasy alliance between the meanings suggested by the text and the interpretations suggested by the author's cultural context.

Morley's suggestions, along with many of those of his contemporaries are based upon the assumption that the encoding or 'preferred reading' of a text 'can be identified',<sup>72</sup> and hence compared to the various decodings that it allows. However these ideas have been radically challenged by the reader response theories of literary critics such as Iser and Fish who questioned whether textual meaning or intention could in fact be identified.<sup>73</sup> Since the late 1980s, when Bennett and Woollacott, wrote that 'the text as such is an impossible object of knowledge',<sup>74</sup> it has become difficult to justify the use of any theory which attributes stability to textual meaning. However, I do not believe that encoding and decoding as theoretical concepts, need to be discarded as, when used with caution, they are in fact perfectly compatible with a more modern perspective. Indeed, Bennett and Woollacott's conclusion that, 'the readings of a text cluster around a limited set of options',<sup>75</sup> is not significantly different from that offered by the encoding / decoding model that they reject. Bennett and Woollacott insist

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<sup>70</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in *Culture Media Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-1979*, ed. by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp.128-138.

<sup>71</sup> David Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: British Film Institute, 1980).

<sup>72</sup> Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, p.10.

<sup>73</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*.

<sup>74</sup> Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London: Macmillan Education, 1987), p.264. Other theorists who reject the notion of an independently existing text include Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* .

<sup>75</sup> Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*, p.267.

that divergent appropriations must not be seen as 'different responses to the same text'<sup>76</sup> because, as they see it, the text becomes different for each reader. The apparent irreconcilability of this position with any project such as mine which seeks to compare source and appropriation is somewhat overcome by the recognition that apparently major differences are reducible to the question of when the text as written becomes the text as read. If one believes that the context of reading actually alters the text, then one must accept that the text's meanings are always inaccessible. If however one believes, as I do, that the context of reading affects only the appearance of the text, then one need not reject comparative analysis of differing interpretations.

Many recent articles, such as Sara Gwenllian Jones', which reject encoding and decoding models as 'limited and clumsy'<sup>77</sup> offer in their place something remarkably similar.<sup>78</sup> In Jones' case this is Marie-Laure Ryan's idea of 'actualisation' which involves 'filling in the blanks in the text with information drawn from the reader's knowledge, memory and experience'.<sup>79</sup> I question to what extent this represents an advance upon Morley's strikingly similar description of decoding: 'The meaning of the text will be constructed differently according to the discourses (knowledges, prejudices, resistances etc.) brought to bear on the text by the reader and the crucial factor in the encounter of audience/ subject and text will be the range of discourses at the disposal of the audience.'<sup>80</sup> Thus for the purposes of this study, though I sidestep the political implications of Morley's investigation into textual hegemony,<sup>81</sup> I will be using the term decoding and discussing how varying ideologies affect the processes of

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<sup>76</sup> Bennett and Woollacot, *Bond and Beyond*, p.62.

<sup>77</sup> Sara Gwenllian Jones, 'The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters', *Screen*, 43 (2002), 79-90 (p.81).

<sup>78</sup> There is one significantly different approach to interpretation and that is Iser's notion of the hermeneutic circle. I believe this to be a viable possibility but not ideally suited to the project of this thesis. Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text', in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. by Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp.77-107 (p.96).

<sup>80</sup> Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, p.18.

<sup>81</sup> As Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst point out, Morley's paradigm formed part of an ongoing debate about the power imbalance that existed between media producers and their audiences. This book also contains a useful overview of the evolving debates in media studies about the power of the text in interpretation. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998).

decoding and appropriation. I will also be making a limited use of the term encoding viewing it as a practice which, though unusually inaccessible, nonetheless exists. I will also be using the term 're-encoding' to refer to the distinctive ways in which appropriated elements are resituated in new texts and this will involve a discussion of how sources and texts offer certain 'cues' which, though they cannot be shown to be inherent, nevertheless affect interpretation. Whether these cues exist in the source or are only activated when the reader begins a contextualised decoding of that source is ultimately uncertain, but in either case cues can and do, as Sean Burke claims, 'colour the window through which the reader looks'.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, as I examine the appropriations being made by female writers, it will become clear that again and again in interpreting a source these writers are appropriating elements that resonate with their own ideological perspective.

The ideas of encoding and decoding are particularly apposite to the discussion of appropriative fiction because they provide a way to articulate the multiple interpretations which typify its structure. Despite the fact that the original encoding or preferred reading of ancient historical sources, such as Plato's dialogues (to take an example to be used more fully in my first chapter) is inaccessible to any subsequent appropriative writer, different writers will develop differing interpretive possibilities through the selective decoding and re-encoding which characterises their appropriative literature. As Bentley paraphrases this Foucauldian view of interpretation, 'no one observer can ever encompass the 'truth' of a situation, [...] which will appear differently to people with distinctive cultures imposing different points of view'.<sup>83</sup> A comparison of different decodings, resulting from the same source will, to follow Bentley's logic, allow us an insight into the cultural position of the writer, and a way to analyse the distinctive ways in which a certain group of appropriative writers are resituating appropriated elements within their own texts. Since 'every description of a text is an interpretation'<sup>84</sup> and 'the rewriter is a critical reader in the deepest sense',<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p.49.

<sup>83</sup> Michael, Bentley, *Modern Historiography*, p.142.

<sup>84</sup> Alan McKee, *Textual analysis: A Beginners Guide* (London: Sage, 2003), p.64.

<sup>85</sup> Moraru, *Re-Writing*, p.4.



the interpretations showcased by the decoding and re-encodings of appropriative fiction offer us an insight into the way decodings of intimacy form distinctive patterns in the texts discussed here. If, as McKee suggests, 'by analysing a text you can find out about the sense making practices that were in place in a culture where it is circulated as meaningful',<sup>86</sup> then by analysing a spectrum of modern appropriative texts by women, it should be possible to uncover the ideologically informed interpretive strategies that link their appropriations and the resulting depictions of male intimacy.

Encoding and decoding are as, Hall and Morley realised, extremely dependant upon culture and context. Although Hall insists, in a way that Bennett and Woollacot would reject, that, through decoding 'different kinds of meaning [can] be ascribed to the same events' or texts,<sup>87</sup> in fact theories which reject any textual influence at all have trouble accounting for the fact that decodings, though various, do appear to form clusters, a point which is readily illustrated by this thesis. These clusters can be explained without recourse to determinable textual meanings, by the hypothesis that shared contexts provide an 'interpretive community'<sup>88</sup> within which readers respond to the text in similar ways. Whilst it is necessary to resist what Cawelti terms 'the assumption of the existence of a collective mind'<sup>89</sup> the idea of interpretive communities helps explain why textual meaning is relatively stable within shared cultural contexts. My work focuses upon appropriative writers who, though not all from the same country, share enough cultural experience to be understood as belonging to a hypothetical interpretive community and indeed their decodings do show a remarkable degree of coherence.

Throughout this investigation appropriative writers are being considered in a manner similar to the approach taken by many theorists who have addressed the issue of reading. As Wolfgang Iser points out, many possible 'readers' are invoked by various literary theories: the 'ideal' reader, the 'super-reader', the

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<sup>86</sup> McKee, *Textual analysis*, p.49

<sup>87</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The Rediscovery of Ideology', in *Literary Theory, An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, revised edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.1050-1064 (p.1050).

<sup>88</sup> Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p.358.

<sup>89</sup> John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.28.

‘informed’ reader, the ‘implied’ reader. The list goes on; but, Iser suggests, they may all simply ‘emerge from the brain of the philologist or critic himself’.<sup>90</sup> Iser suggests that since the reader’s decoding is unknowable, analysts should instead concentrate upon the more accessible potential of the text itself - something of an irony given the debates discussed above. There are two readers (or decoders) discussed in this thesis, the appropriative reader who decodes sources prior to appropriating certain elements for their own texts, and the modern reader who reads the resulting appropriative fictions. In many cases their reading strategies are similar, in which case I have simply used the term ‘reader’ to cover both possibilities. There are however some differences because, in the case of the appropriative reader, there is at least a limited access to decoding which is showcased by the appropriative texts produced. The modern reader’s decodings are less accessible, except by extrapolation from my own reading strategies and the assumption that I share cultural perspectives with many of them. It could of course be argued that the conclusions, representations and textual analyses within this thesis grew from my own idiosyncratic interpretations and on one level indeed they did for as Vincent Quinn gleefully points out, ‘literary critical essays are a form of creative writing’ but ‘there is nothing sinister about this’.<sup>91</sup>

The ideas of encoding and decoding are also particularly appropriate for my discussion of the representation of eroticism within the text, for it is through the codes of text and context that modern and appropriative readers piece together the erotic significance of any interpersonal encounter represented within the text. When the subject of the text is the possibly erotic relationship between two men, the influence of culturally prevalent ideologies and stereotypes will be central to interpretation. As Kenneth Plummer reminds us, ‘stereotypes provide “cues” for some perceivers to interpret an individual who exhibits these “cues” (whether homosexual or not) as homosexual.’<sup>92</sup> Richard Dyer insists that both encoding and decoding are used to make sense of sex and sexuality in our culture, a world in which ‘a repertoire of signs, making visible the invisible, is

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<sup>90</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.28.

<sup>91</sup> Vincent Quinn, ‘Loose Reading? Sedgwick, Austin and Critical Practice’, *Textual Practice*, 14 (2000), 305-326 (p.313, p.312).

<sup>92</sup> Kenneth Plummer, *Sexual Stigma: An Interactionist Approach* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p.181.

the basis of any representation of gay people'<sup>93</sup>. Outside of textual representation, within the real world of gay subcultures, a person may choose to display their sexuality via the adoption of a certain symbol, for instance the wearing of suede shoes and cigarette holders, leathers and chains or key rings and pink triangles.<sup>94</sup> These symbolic gestures might be thought of as enacting or 'encoding' an individual's sexuality, and they are intrinsically linked to the cultural codes which are current at the time they are displayed. Similarly an individual's sexuality is frequently assessed by the 'decoding' of such 'cues' and the success, or otherwise, of that decoding depends on the cultural codes held by the decoder and their degree of similarity to or difference from those of the individual assessed. Returning to the fictional world of the novel, the cultural specificity of sexuality cues provides particular challenges for the appropriative writer. The writer of appropriative fiction is faced with the possible mismatch between the cues within their source material and the cultural assumptions they and their modern readers share. Most importantly elements within the source text may not survive the transition to a new textual context with their meaning intact. An example will serve to illustrate my point: during much of the Renaissance period, despite the general repudiation of same sex activity, two men could kiss, even publicly, without it signalling erotic intent. For this reason kissing between men in Renaissance texts did not necessarily cue erotic decodings; to encourage such decodings, images of kissing needed to be embedded in particular contexts.<sup>95</sup> The appropriative writer making use of such imagery in the modern text would find it hard to create a textual context in which two men, not relatives, could kiss without the modern reader decoding it as eroticism. The appropriative writer will be faced again and again with these kinds of negotiations and the ways in which they choose to resolve them will produce distinctive effects in their own texts. For the writer of the sexually explicit text of male homosexuality, textual cues which were not erotic in their original source may offer themselves for erotic re-encoding. The writer who wishes to explore male intimacy without directly referencing male homosexuality will however have to

<sup>93</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.43, p.19.

<sup>94</sup> Harold Beaver, 'Homosexual Signs', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 99-119 (p.105). These examples are from the 1950s 1960s and 1970s respectively.

<sup>95</sup> Alan Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England', *History Workshop*, 29 (1990), 1-19.

be far more circumspect in their re-encoding, for many intimate images now carry homoerotic connotations. Whether they write sexually explicit or sexually ambiguous descriptions of male intimacy all the women writers brought together in this thesis have chosen as their appropriative sources materials which contain ambiguities surrounding the eroticisation of male intimacy. Perhaps this is because in their very ambiguity these sources allow the appropriative writer to decode and re-encode proffered cues in varying ways without sacrificing the plausibility of their interpretations.

### **Representing sex: understanding ambiguous sources**

Henry Jenkins has asked, 'how do texts determine the sexual orientation of their characters'?<sup>96</sup> This thesis is particularly interested in a parallel question: what happens when they do not? When an intimate relationship within a source is neither marked as sexual nor denoted as something else, it offers a wealth of decodings to the appropriative reader. As Jenkins highlights, modern readers are accustomed to decoding the sexual orientation of fictional characters but they have like academics been more focused upon individual orientation than on the sexual or erotic qualities of interpersonal relationships. Sinfield comments upon this bias when he admits in *Gay and After* that, 'like the rest of our society I have been preoccupied with modes of sexuality and with the movement between them. But the line between the sexual and the non-sexual should not be taken for granted.'<sup>97</sup> As I have done, Sinfield cites historical examples where the line between friendship and homosexuality has become indistinct to modern decoders, who now see only what he terms 'something like homosexuality'.<sup>98</sup> Despite the decoder's efforts, the sexually ambiguous source undermines the plausibility of fully sexual decodings, but nonetheless cues awareness of erotic potentials. In terms of same sex desire it does not denote homosexuality but never the less appears to hint at 'something like homosexuality'.<sup>99</sup> Suggestive textual cues offer themselves for appropriation and re-encoding, during which

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<sup>96</sup> Henry Jenkins, 'Out of the Closet and into the universe: Queers and *Star Trek*', in *Science Fiction Audiences*, ed. by John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.237-265 (p.237).

<sup>97</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Gay and After* (London: Serpents Tail, 1998), p.194.

<sup>98</sup> Sinfield, *Gay and After*, p.194.

<sup>99</sup> Sinfield, *Gay and After*, p.194.

the writer may re-inscribe ambiguity in new ways or resituate appropriated cues to remove their ambiguity. Ambiguously sexual/nonsexual histories and sources have provoked heated debate amongst scholars who, like Santanu Das, are searching for ways to discuss, 'a continuum of non genital tactile tenderness that goes beyond strict gender divisions, sexual binaries or identity politics,'<sup>100</sup> but struggle to find the appropriate framework for such a discussion. Indeed there currently exists no effective way of discussing the sexually ambiguous text nor the challenge it presents to the appropriative reader and writer. In order to discuss the complex negotiations that appropriative writers make with their sexually ambiguous sources, I will need a tool to describe the way various cues work together in the source material to both suggest and limit erotic potential.

I will briefly mention some of the possible ways of discussing the sexually ambiguous source or text and consider their applicability or otherwise to this project before offering a tool ideally suited to the analysis at hand here. For the purposes of this thesis the term 'ambiguity' will henceforth always refer to sexual ambiguity, thus here an 'ambiguous' source or text is one which through the interaction of sexual and non-sexual cues suggests erotic possibilities but frustrates attempts to realise them fully within its own context.<sup>101</sup> Bennett and Royle distinguish the general term 'ambiguity' from the poststructuralist term 'undecideability' claiming that ambiguity suggests a 'complex but organic whole' whilst undecideability suggests a 'rift' which 'opens the text to multiple readings'.<sup>102</sup> However I believe Bennett and Royle are wrong to suggest that these two positions are incompatible. Something may resist secure readings and yet still be understood as a complex, holistic and analysable structure. Hence my use of the term ambiguity should not be thought of as contradicting my assertion that such sources resist sexual and non-sexual interpretations alike.

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<sup>100</sup> Santanu Das, "'Kiss me Hardy': Intimacy, Gender and Gesture in World War 1 Trench Literature', *Modernism/ Modernity*, 9 (2002), 51-74 (p.56).

<sup>101</sup> For other literary uses of the term ambiguity, see William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956). Although none of Empson's ambiguities concern sexuality they do address other ways in which a text can create internal conflicts and uncertainties.

<sup>102</sup> Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), p.204.

The most commonly referenced theory when addressing the sexually ambiguous source is Sedgwick's homosocial continuum. However Sedgwick was not interested in investigating sexually ambiguous structures but rather in removing their ambiguity. She claimed that to argue that 'the narrative itself points[...] simply to a possibility of "homosexual meaning" is to say worse than nothing'.<sup>103</sup> Nonetheless Sedgwick's concepts of 'homosocial desire' and the 'male homosocial continuum'<sup>104</sup> frequently form a central part of critical investigations of sexually ambiguous texts. Her continuum model suggests a direct relationship between homosocial and homosexual behaviours, one which is radically disrupted by homophobia but which nonetheless exists. The term 'homosocial desire' was designed to remind one of the link between the homosocial and the homosexual; 'to draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire."'<sup>105</sup> However in textual terms such a linear representation of relationships between men implicitly suggests one of two things: either that as a text increases in homosocial cues it must necessarily show a decrease in homosexual ones, or that there is some arbitrary point at which the homosociality is so great that it could be more accurately termed homosexuality. Whilst a text in the middle of the continuum, with a medium amount of both homosexual and homosocial implication is likely to show ambiguities surrounding sexuality, a simultaneous increase in both homosexual and homosocial implication could maintain a text's ambiguity whilst allowing it no comparative representational place on Sedgwick's homosocial continuum. In fact the simultaneous use of many homosexual connotations balanced by an overt homosocial context is one of the most common constructs of ambiguity, and one which is frequently exploited by the appropriative writers investigated here. Sedgwick's claim that 'homosexual activity can be either supportive of or oppositional to homosocial bonding',<sup>106</sup> suggests that she is aware of the limits of a linear continuum model to represent the full spectrum of relationships which lie between the homosexual and homosocial. However as a tool of analysis for ambiguous sources the continuum model, as she presents it, lacks a clear definition and to be fair,

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<sup>103</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.204.

<sup>104</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.1-2.

<sup>105</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p.2.

<sup>106</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p.6.

despite how it is used by others, Sedgwick never intended it as a tool for analysis of texts, but rather as a model of the ideologies informing cultural representation. Though her examination of the complex relationships between the homosocial, homoerotic and homosexual, as well as her analysis of the sexual connotations of texts, clearly has links to my own project, Sedgwick prefers to highlight the sexual potentialities, 'recognizing the homosexual in the text',<sup>107</sup> rather than, as my project does, highlighting the construction and negotiation of ambiguity. Sedgwick's theory is also heavily politicised; for her 'homosocial desire' is a patriarchal structure which privileges bonds between men and enables the exclusion of women. Like Das I find these structures too polemically limiting to discuss the decodings being made of male bonds of intimacy by writers who may have little interest in the politicised structures which Sedgwick aims to highlight and my own use of the term 'homosocial' implies simply social bonds between men. Sedgwick's examination of textual ideologies does not provide me with adequate tools to address the questions I need to ask in order to understand the varying structures of ambiguous sources and hence the appropriations that can be made from them.<sup>108</sup>

Though far less cited than Sedgwick's, another model of ambiguity is suggested by Michael Hatt in his essay 'The Male Body in Another Frame'. He too talks of the 'dangerous closeness of the [homo]social and sexual', but hypothesises that it is the homoerotic that functions as the 'visible boundary' that separates the two.<sup>109</sup> Whilst he offers some very useful 'strategies of containment',<sup>110</sup> by which he means the way that apparently homosexual cues can be contained within a non-sexual context, he labels these strategies as homoerotic. Despite his attempt to redefine homoerotic as something which disavows the sexual, his analysis remains problematic because the homoerotic is, by the very nature of its meaning, already eroticised and cannot describe

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<sup>107</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p.94.

<sup>108</sup> The investigation of the ambiguous text parallels to some degree Terry Castle's investigation of the 'apparitional lesbian'. Castle asked, 'through what textual gestures, or representational manoeuvres, does it make itself known'? Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.152.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame', *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts: The Body Issue* (1993), 8-21 (p.13).

<sup>110</sup> Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame', p.13.

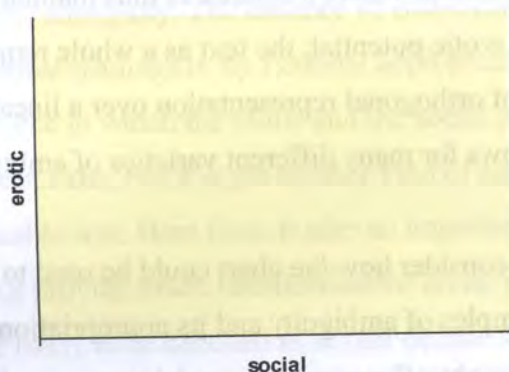
ambiguity. The problem is that there exists no term for something sexually ambiguous; 'homosocial' denotes something not sexual, whilst 'homosexual' and 'homoerotic' respectively denote the sexual in either act or imagination. Hatt's imagery is of homoerotic 'frames' which act as boundaries separating the homosocial and homosexual and imperfectly containing the homosexual. Even aside from my quibble with his semantics, this does not offer a very adaptive model for ambiguity. In his model an ambiguous text would be within the 'frame', a permeable and fluid structure that resists analysis. Though it is certainly true that ambiguity has fluid boundaries, the frame model, like the continuum one, does not allow for a conception of the relative salience of sexual versus non-sexual cues. This balance is in fact crucial to the structure of ambiguity and any tool for discussing ambiguity must be able to describe it. Like Sedgwick's model, Hatt's does little more than situate the sexually ambiguous text between the non-sexual homosocial text and the explicitly homosexual one. In the end neither Hatt nor Sedgwick are able to offer models which account for the complex interactions of the often overlapping social, intimate, erotic and sexual cues which are available for appropriation in the ambiguous source.

What is required to analyse the sexually ambiguous source and the appropriation made from it by the writers considered here, is a tool which accounts for the differently inflected textual cues which together suggest sexual ambiguity. Such a tool must also be able to help describe how the act of appropriation can place these cues within a new context and thus alter their appearance. Only by creating such a tool is it possible to describe what constitutes sexual ambiguity in a text rather than simply pointing out its ideological functions. With such a tool I can follow the appropriative writer's interest in unpicking and repackaging that ambiguity. When an ambiguous source describes intimacy it may be unclear whether that intimacy is sexual or not; in order to sexualise or desexualise it some kind of creative intervention is performed by the reader, whether consciously or not. This intervention may take the form of critical writing similar to much queer criticism, of appropriation as in the case of slash fiction, or simply of selective decoding as is the case for many modern readers. The cues offered by ambiguous sources do not readily condense to form a fully sexual interpretation unless, and this is crucial, they are



appropriated and resituated in a new context. Hence I also need a tool which allows me to easily compare the way various appropriations may reposition a cue as more or less sexual. To facilitate discussion, one way of representing both ambiguity and the appropriations made from it would be to suggest an orthogonal relationship between the sexual and non-sexual cues within a text. This model could be represented by a simple chart on which the erotic, sometimes sexual, cues<sup>111</sup> are plotted at right angles to the social, but non-sexual, cues which together create ambiguity.

### Ambiguous Structures



The two axes represent the sometimes contradictory cues found within an ambiguous source. 'Erotic' is used to denote a range of cues which have sexual connotations; these may range from actual sexual intercourse, to emotional responses such as sexual jealousy or possessiveness. 'Social' denotes all non-sexual, social cues, which in the sources under consideration here might range from the exclusively male societies of the battlefield, to intimate relationships such as friendship. It should also be recognised that many cues, such as kissing, hand holding and eye contact might be included in either category, depending upon the context in which they occur, and indeed this flexibility is crucial to

<sup>111</sup> 'Erotic' and 'Sexual' are complexly interrelated terms which together cover a broad spectrum of literary representation. Although I do not think the concepts are fully separable, the erotic is concerned with more connotive literary structures and the sexual with more dennotive patterns. The erotic may or may not be directly sexual, and the sexual, though generally erotic, is not necessarily so. In my consideration of which term to use in a given context I have been guided by the text under discussion.

many of the texts discussed here.<sup>112</sup> An ambiguous source or text would be likely to be positioned somewhere in the diagonal centre of this chart for it is likely to contain both social and erotic cues working together. It is important to recognise that context is crucial to positioning any source or cue, for without context it is impossible to tell whether a representation such as sharing a bed is erotic, social or ambiguous. This context may be suggested by the source, the circumstances of decoding or both. My orthogonal model can be used to explain why it is that, as Sedgwick pointed out, war novels can look 'startlingly homosexual'.<sup>113</sup> It is because the context of the war novel provides numerous social cues which justify the intense same sex interactions and their concurrent erotic cues. Certain contexts, then, work to reposition otherwise erotic cues more towards the social axis of the representation. Where a balance is thus maintained between the social denotation and the erotic potential, the text as a whole remains ambiguous. One of the advantages of orthogonal representation over a linear continuum type model is that it allows for many different varieties of ambiguity.

Let us now consider how the chart could be used to aid discussion of some concrete examples of ambiguity and its appropriations. One type of ambiguous source might offer numerous social cues as well as offering just enough erotic cues to be suggestive to the attentive reader; this is the source which is likely to be decoded as sexual only by a minority of readers. Much traditional American literature comes under this category for its representation of loving, loyal, yet apparently asexual male friendships such as that between Ishmael and Queequeg depicted by Melville in *Moby Dick*.<sup>114</sup> That some readers can decode these ambiguous texts as sexual is evidenced by the critical work of Byrne Fone amongst others.<sup>115</sup> These nineteenth century texts might be positioned on my chart here.

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<sup>112</sup> Despite the fact that I am discussing the representation of same sex interaction I have resisted using the terms homoerotic and homosocial, because of their associations. Homoerotic is associated with identity politics which for reasons discussed later are incompatible with many of the appropriations discussed here; homosocial invokes patriarchal behaviours embedded in heterosexist societies, a situation which is once again distinct from the current discussion of textual appropriation.

<sup>113</sup> Sedgwick, 1985, p.89

<sup>114</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (1851, repr. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998).

<sup>115</sup> Byrne R.S. Fone, *Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992).

### Hypothetical Ambiguous Structures One



This positioning shows how a combination of social and erotic cues helps create the reader's awareness of ambiguity. The salience of erotic cues may be enhanced by various critical readings or by fictional appropriations. The perfectly ambiguous source in which the erotic and the social exist in perfect balance probably does not exist, but it is yet another kind of ambiguity which is perhaps the most noticeable sort. Here there is also an imperfect balance, one in which social cues do not provide much justification for erotic possibilities. In this kind of source cues are likely to be decoded as sexual despite surrounding ambiguities. Such an example can be found in Plato's *Symposium*, where the young seductive Alcibiades attempts to seduce the philosopher Socrates.<sup>116</sup> Whilst one can never be sure how this incident was intended to be interpreted by Plato, today it suggests many erotic possibilities but is none the less embedded in a context which appears to argue for the restraint of desire as the governing force of intimate relations between men. One possible decoding of this incident within the context of the *Symposium* would place it thus:

<sup>116</sup> Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, ed. by Candace Ward, (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1993)

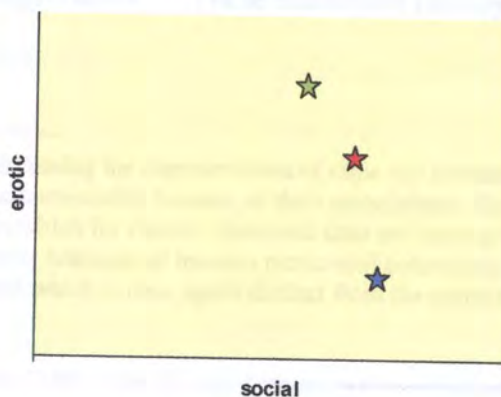


### Hypothetical Ambiguous Structures Two



Here, despite the highly social nature of the context the erotic cues are nevertheless extremely salient - at least to the modern reader. It is easy to see how by altering the context one could alter the salience of the erotic and social cues which maintain its ambiguity. One possibility would be to re-encode the incident in a more philosophical way emphasising the intellectual and social ideals which it embodies. Conversely one can easily imagine a fictional appropriation which enhanced the erotic possibilities by embedding the same incident within a story of frustrated sexual attraction. These two possibilities could easily be compared using the chart: the first possibility is shown as a blue star (high on the social axis, low on the erotic one), the second as a green star (high on both the social and erotic axes), the original red star, representing the original context, remains for comparison.

### Ambiguous Structures and Their Appropriations



Using this chart as a tool it is easy to see how the ambiguous source and the appropriations it might inspire could all utilise the same incident and yet offer that incident for decoding in very different ways. The orthogonal representation demonstrates how this repositioning is connected to an alteration which occurs in the balance of the social and erotic cues that make up the represented incident in its varying contexts. The new appropriation may remove the original ambiguity or it may simply restructure it, for as I have shown all ambiguities are not the same. Whilst this theory of ambiguity might be conceived of as part of a queer project to show how sources resist the classifications of ‘sexual’ and ‘non-sexual’, appreciating instead the variant possibilities offered, in fact it fails to achieve this on several counts. Not least of these is the fact that ambiguous structures rely on the decoder’s desire and willingness to classify cues as either erotic or social; hence ambiguous sources rely on the existence of the very binaries they appear to elude.

It can be seen that sexually ambiguous sources and their representations rely upon what I have been calling ‘cues’, those elements that trigger, or cue, sexual or social understandings. These cues may work to direct the reader towards or away from social or sexual understandings. For instance a source which repeatedly insisted that a certain relationship was ‘different’, ‘unique’ and ‘out of the ordinary’ may pull the interpreter away from simple social decodings, though it may or may not, depending on the individual reader, suggest sexual decodings instead. As I have highlighted above, my emphasis on cues and how they may be appropriated and repositioned should not be taken to suggest that I believe in the fixed or stable nature of these cues. Indeed I hope that one of the things this thesis highlights is the very fluidity of cues which are being manipulated through the act of appropriation. Roland Barthes’ impressively detailed *S/Z*, in which he analysed the ‘codes’ he could find in Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, set a precedent for the analysis of textual coding. Unfortunately however Barthes’ work has also linked that type of analysis with the limitations of a fixed notion of structuralism. For although Barthes acknowledges the subjectivity of reading, he immediately insists that even subjectivity may be

rendered stable for 'subjectivity has ultimately the generality of stereotypes'.<sup>117</sup> Barthes' analysis breaks the source text apart into 'blocks of signification'<sup>118</sup> largely ignoring the context, either of his own reading or of the wider textual positioning in which these signs appear. By contrast my 'cues' are dependant on their context and changing that context may change the way they function. Thus while I analyse the structure of sources both historical and textual, my approach is not that of decontextualised structuralism. As I have already highlighted, decoding relies both upon the cues offered by the source and upon the assumptions made by the reader; both will govern how the reader approaches and deals with those cues.<sup>119</sup>

I must once again mention the question of my own subjectivity for this will inevitably affect my placing of cues onto my chart. The objection of subjectivity might be raised against any form of literary criticism which is after all, as Fish recognised in 1980, the art of 'persuasion' rather than demonstration.<sup>120</sup> Despite the apparently objectivist approach of using charts on which I have plotted cues, I am not denying the subjective nature of the positioning of each point. The graphical representation should not be taken as a claim to objectivity any greater than that made by the standard modes of literary criticism. Joseph Carroll, who feels that literary criticism should 'satisfy the criteria for empirical validity', argues that the literary critic is responsible to 'general standards of objective validity'.<sup>121</sup> Although my graphical representation of the ways in which social and erotic cues can interact in the interpretation of interpersonal relationships could be used as the basis for empirical work on the way that decodings are made, I shall not attempt any large scale analysis of this type here. Since such analysis is only distinct from traditional literary criticism in its replacement of a single subjective point of view with a multitude of subjectivities, it comes little closer to Carroll's ideal of 'empirical validity' in

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<sup>117</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p.10.

<sup>118</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, p.13.

<sup>119</sup> For a playful account of this process see David Lodge, *Small World* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), in which the academic Morris Zapp claims 'every decoding is another encoding'. p.25.

<sup>120</sup> Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p.368.

<sup>121</sup> Joseph Carol, "Theory", Anti-Theory and Empirical Criticism', in *Biopoetics: Evolutionary Explorations in the Arts*, ed. by B. Cooke and F. Turner, (Kentucky: ICUS, 1999), pp.139-154 (p.148, p.142).

textual interpretation. My scepticism toward the possibility, suggested by Carroll, that textual interpretations can ever be truly validated, leads me towards using the chart only as a tool with which to facilitate discussion of various, admittedly subjective, possibilities for decoding.

Appropriative writers who are making sexual re-encodings from ambiguous sources are particularly challenging to any assumption that either history or text is fixed and stable. Ambiguous sources allow for a particularly wide spectrum of decoding, for as Iser suggested they 'must contain the conditions by which [they] can take on a different appearance at different times'.<sup>122</sup> The conditions of the ambiguous source are, as I have suggested above, a particular combination of erotic and social cues which may simultaneously offer contradictory possibilities for decoding. Stanley Fish's work on the fluidity of decoding failed to adequately engage with the possibility that ambiguity may have two possible meanings which may exist simultaneously. For Fish no textual cue could have more than one meaning in any given context, although changing the context may alter that meaning. Where it was apparent that something could be understood two ways, Fish insisted that its single meaning was therefore multiplicity itself.<sup>123</sup> This argument fails to deal with the situation where two, possibly opposing, meanings may be simultaneously read into a source. In the case of ambiguous sources I suggest that the appropriative reader frequently decodes a cue within two different contexts at the same time. In many cases these will be, firstly the social context offered by the source itself, and, secondly the erotic context suggested by the ideologies of the appropriative reader's interpretive community.<sup>124</sup> It is through these dual contexts that ambiguous sources are appropriated, and their cues repositioned in ways distinctive to the writer's interpretive community, the ideologies that inform it and the psychological predispositions it encourages. In complete contrast to Iser's early theories which insisted that it was 'only by leaving behind the familiar world of

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<sup>122</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of communications in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

<sup>123</sup> Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* .

<sup>124</sup> Such a dual decoding is highlighted in chapter two where I discuss how Pat Barker represents the relationship between Rivers and Sassoon as ambiguous in the context of her novel, even though in her own private context, she interpreted the relationship in terms of sexual attraction p.79.

his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the[...]literary text'<sup>125</sup> I highlight how it is that the appropriative reader's 'familiar world' crucially informs their participation in the appropriative act. What is more, I believe that that familiar world of the appropriative writer's interpretive contexts will impose itself on the texts they create and can be investigated by examining the ideologies which appear to have informed appropriative decodings and re-encodings.

Thus this thesis is involved in two projects: The first project is to elucidate the existence of a genre of texts by women which explore a spectrum of male intimacy. These texts are, like those by the homosexual writers described by Jonathon Dollimore, 'loosely connected through shared representations'.<sup>126</sup> The second project is to use the detailed investigation of these shared representations and the decodings which shape them to inform a wider debate about women's writing and the ways their representations of male intimacy can help illuminate the shared ideologies of women's interpretive communities. This will augment my claim that, at least within this genre, women's writing is shaped by their 'specifically feminine psychology'<sup>127</sup> and the predilections it has for specific representations and appropriations. My first chapter will consider the historical novels of Mary Renault, whose works have been particularly influential for many subsequent appropriative writers,<sup>128</sup> and whose sexual fictions of male intimacy demonstrate many of the distinctive patterns to be found across this genre and highlight the particular importance of connections between love, friendship and intimacy. My second chapter looks at Pat Barker's *Regeneration* an ambiguous novel which demonstrates many of the same concerns as Renault's sexual texts and highlights the intimacy it represents through the privatisation of the homosocial experience. Having thus considered both sexual and ambiguous texts, and the features they share, my third chapter

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<sup>125</sup> Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p.282.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.45.

<sup>127</sup> Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, p.15.

<sup>128</sup> That Renault's fictions are particularly influential was suggested to me by the results of a survey of slash fiction writers. When asked if they had read any male/male romances prior to reading and writing slash fiction, every respondent who claimed to have done so mentioned Mary Renault. This survey was conducted at an American slash convention held in March 2004 and at a UK Slash convention held in August 2004. (full results can be found in appendix one p.251 and are discussed in more detail in chapter five)



focuses on Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting*, and names the genre of which it is a part. I use *Strange Meeting* to offer a detailed investigation of the intimate homosocial world this genre depicts. My fourth chapter returns to the sexual text, discussing how Mel Keegan's explicit 'gay adventures'<sup>129</sup> negotiate the ideological features of the genre under discussion. My fifth chapter examines the idea of interpretive communities in more detail by investigating a community of slash fiction writers who share a distinctive ideological perspective familiar from the texts already discussed. I also use this chapter to demonstrate the importance of contextualisation and hence to highlight the need for the genre definition I offer. My sixth and final chapter, concludes by expanding my findings to a range of other texts and offering an outline of the ideologies and textual features they share. It is here that I return to the specific question of women's writing and discuss the unique ideological perspectives of the feminine genre I have defined.

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<sup>129</sup> This term comes from the back cover of *Fortunes of War*. Mel Keegan, *Fortunes of War* (Brighton: The Gay Men's Press, 1995)

**Chapter One**  
**Mary Renault**  
**Of Love Friendship and Intimacy**

Mary Renault (1905-1983), though not the first woman to write fiction which could be considered as part of the genre under investigation here, is one of the most widely read and influential. Renault was educated at St Hugh's College Oxford and served as a nurse during the Second World War, but the greatest proportion of her adult life was spent in South Africa, first in Durban and then in Cape Town. Renault moved to South Africa with her partner Julie Mullard in 1948, and although she considered herself bisexual, her lifelong relationship with Julie appears to have been monogamous.<sup>1</sup> Within the community at Durban Renault's political interests included an involvement in the anti-apartheid movement and an ambivalent relationship to feminism both of which are well documented by Caroline Zilboorg in her critical biography *The Masks of Mary Renault*. Renault and Mullard maintained social ties with a small number of self identified homosexual men who had formed a coterie reputed to be 'wild and outrageous'.<sup>2</sup> Renault's first text about male intimacy, *The Charioteer*, was published in the UK in 1953 and in America in 1959, although its frankness about sexual love between men was quite striking, the 1950s, were reputedly years in which many women appeared to be more tolerant of love between men than men themselves, compared to whom, according to one observer, they showed 'a commendable open mindedness'.<sup>3</sup>

Renault had a life long fascination with Plato's works which she 'read and reread'<sup>4</sup> and which frequently became appropriative sources for her novels. Renault's *The Charioteer*, the title of which is a reference to the Platonic myth it most explicitly explores, is set in England during the Second World War, and is heavily influenced by Renault's personal experiences as a nurse during that war

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault: A Literary Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault*, p.105.

<sup>3</sup> Derrick S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition* (London: Longmans Green, 1955), p.161.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Hoberman, 'Masquing the Phallus: Genital Ambiguity in Mary Renault's Historical Novels', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42 (1996), 377-93 (p.282).

as well as by her knowledge of the homosexual subculture of Durban.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the novel her exploration of the developing relationships between her three male protagonists, Ralph, Laurie and Andrew, are coloured by ideals and images she appropriated from Plato. Though several of her subsequent novels would also take same sex desire as a theme, for the purposes of this thesis the next significant text she wrote was *Fire From Heaven* published in 1969, which tells of the events surrounding Alexander the Great's growth to manhood. This was closely followed in 1972 by its sequel *The Persian Boy*, which, narrated by Alexander's eunuch slave and lover, Bagoas, tells of Alexander's mature life. Although the appropriation of Plato in these later texts is less overt, images from the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* remain central, inflecting the novel's representations of relationships between men. Although Bernard Dick claims that *The Charioteer* and the Alexander novels are completely dissimilar, linked only by an oblique reference to the Oedipus complex,<sup>6</sup> I hope that the following will provide ample evidence that, considered in the light of their shared representations, the three novels are in fact strikingly similar. Indeed I have chosen to consider the two Alexander novels in conjunction with *The Charioteer*, despite the 16 years which separate them, because they are so clearly linked by the appropriative strategies they share. It is these strategies, and the distinctive ways in which they work to resituate appropriated images, which begin to provide us with an insight into Mary Renault's re-encoding of male intimacies.

Although the three novels I am considering in this chapter are all historically appropriative novels, being set in an era which predates their publication, none of them offer a simplistic re-encoding of popular history. Like all directly appropriative novels, *The Charioteer*, *Fire From Heaven* and *The Persian Boy* offer a fusion of ideologies extrapolated from the appropriated source and those imported from the novelists' own interpretive communities. Although Neil MacEwan praises Renault's Alexander novels for their 'determination to occupy a Macedonian viewpoint',<sup>7</sup> other commentators, such as Julian Hartt, have highlighted the novels' debts to Renault's own more

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault*, p.87.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard F. Dick, *The Hellenism of Mary Renault* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Neil MacEwan, *Perspective in British Historical Fiction Today* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.7.

modern ideologies, suggesting that they throw ‘a very modest amount of light on Alexander in his world’.<sup>8</sup> Whilst it is almost impossible to determine how historically accurate any modern interpretation of history is, what these appropriative novels can shed light on is the way in which Renault’s ideologies have interacted with those suggested by her sources. This becomes particularly clear when Renault’s re-encoding of history diverges from popular paradigms, as it does for instance in her representation of pederasty. Perhaps in these cases, as DuPlessis suggests about other women writers, Renault is trying to transform the cultural hegemonies<sup>9</sup>, in this case those surrounding Greek history and sexuality. It is the difference or liminal space to be found between cultural hegemonies and Renault’s representations which facilitate my investigation of the interpretive strategies informing the representation of interpersonal relationships between men.

In order to dissect the interpretive decisions informing Renault’s re-encoding, it is necessary to consider the cultural contexts which underpinned her acts of appropriation. Attempting to understand Renault’s novels through our own early 21st century culture, as Zilboorg does when she claims that *The Charioteer* has a modern sensibility which has ‘more in common with queer understandings of sexuality than with the progressive homophile movements of [Renault’s] [...] early maturity’,<sup>10</sup> ultimately tells us little about Renault’s interpretive practices. Such an approach, although it is in itself a revealing example of how our own culture influences our decoding, sidesteps the crucial engagement between the appropriative writer and the source text. Zilboorg’s approach is one which brings the critic’s interpretive community, in this case a ‘queer’ one, to the author under consideration. In contrast, this thesis attempts to use the text to gain insight into the interpretive community of the appropriative writer. Therefore, as a preface to my investigation of the interpretive strategies and communities which inform *The Charioteer*, I will offer a brief historical

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<sup>8</sup> Julian N. Hartt, ‘Two Historical Novels’, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 49 (1973) 450-458 (p.454).

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p.122.

<sup>10</sup> Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault*, p. xi.

commentary on both the 1940s, when the novel was set, and the 1950s when it was written.

As *The Charioteer* frequently implies, the Second World War threw many men into homosocial situations extremely conducive to intense and sometimes erotic interactions. Many memoirs from the war years testify to the accuracy of this implication, for instance Bernard Dobson recalls his participation in the Army corps thus: 'there was this close feeling there, that you get with a lot of men together, a lot of horseplay that had sexual undertones – lots of groping and grabbing and playing around.'<sup>11</sup> John Alcock, a gay man who experienced the war as a time of freedom, recalls that it was very easy during the war for men to find male partners for casual sex.<sup>12</sup> For some the homosocial environment created so many possibilities that Colin Spencer's history of homosexuality goes as far as to claim that 'the war years had been a sexual golden era'.<sup>13</sup> The ambiguous and erotic possibilities offered by homosocial environments, similar to that of the Second World War, will be exploited to some degree by all the appropriative texts considered in this thesis. In the specific case of the Second World War, however, it must be acknowledged that the homosocial environment and its concomitant erotic possibilities had several negative repercussions. Fuelled by the increasing visibility of homosexuality, beginning in the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s, there was a rise in hostility towards both self identified homosexuals and sexual behaviour between men. In 1949 the British Department of Defence issued a memo stating that 'all known homosexuals must be eliminated from the services'<sup>14</sup> and in 1950, an official report on the employment of homosexuals in the American government claimed that 'one homosexual can pollute a government office'.<sup>15</sup> By the early 1950s Colin Spencer claimed, that for homosexuals, 'Britain had become a police state'<sup>16</sup> and Derek Metherringham recalls that 'police entrapment was rife'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories*, ed. by the Gay Men's History Group, Hall Carpenter Archives (London: Routledge, 1989), p.63.

<sup>12</sup> *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories*, p.44 - 45.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Spencer, *Homosexuality: A History* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995), p.354.

<sup>14</sup> D.J. West, *Homosexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p.91.

<sup>15</sup> 'Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in the U.S. Government', repr. in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Source book of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, ed. by Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.241-251 (p.247).

<sup>16</sup> Spencer, *Homosexuality: A History*, p.361.

Perhaps as a reaction against this, this era also saw the beginnings of the homophile movements which insisted upon the rights of homosexual individuals. In 1948 Henry Hay began promoting his concept of 'the homosexual minority' under a rubric which insisted that it was 'possible and desirable that a highly ethical homosexual culture emerge'.<sup>18</sup>

*The Charioteer* is informed by all of these somewhat conflicting historical elements: the novel exploits the homosocial environment through which the various protagonists meet one another, depicts the realities of prejudice and hatred, and considers the cultural options open to individuals. Renault's consideration of the place of the individual in society was probably partially inspired by interpretive communities emerging in the early 1950s who moved away from purely scientific considerations of homosexual behaviours and identities, towards interpretations which focused upon community and culture. Resonating with this historical background, Renault's central appropriative sources, Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, also offered ways of exploring same sex intimacy which focused on the social rules for interpersonal interaction. Whilst it was perhaps this resonance that drew Renault to Plato it is the recontextualisations she makes of Platonic elements that reveal the most about the interpretive practices informing her novel.

### **Exploring Ambiguous Sources: Social and Sexual Appropriation**

Plato is an interesting choice as an appropriative source for a sexual text such as *The Charioteer* since the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, at least as they can be understood in our culture, are often ambiguous in their representation of sexual intimacy. Like many ambiguous texts and histories they offer the reader a combination of erotic and social cues. Despite never actually describing any sexual act, the texts are saturated with erotic possibilities and connotations. Both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* present discourses on love and describe interaction between men which is stimulating to them on both an intellectual and

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Bourne, *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), p.246.

<sup>18</sup> Rictor Norton, *The Myth of The Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997), p.5.

a physical level. The sexual elements remain veiled throughout and, in many of the common translations, exactly what is being spoken of, and where the sexual / social boundaries lie remains extremely unclear. For instance Pausanias' speech which begins, 'evil is the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul',<sup>19</sup> is ostensibly about the social and educative value of pederasty, in which the older man is 'capable of communicating wisdom and virtue' and the younger is 'seeking after knowledge and making his object education and wisdom' (*Symposium* p.12). And yet, within these terms Pausanias states that the younger man should 'service' 'indulge' and 'yield' to the older, all cues which, despite the context of intellectual interaction, may appear to suggest sexual acts. Whatever these cues suggest for the average reader, academic commentators on Plato frequently highlight the distance between Platonic interactions between men and modern day homosexual experiences.<sup>20</sup> Despite these very real differences, for most modern readers the sexual ambiguity remains and indeed it is this very ambiguity that enables Renault's appropriative recontextualisations.

A brief perusal of various literatures inspired by Plato will amply demonstrate the latitude it offers the appropriative reader. Licht's *Sexual life in Ancient Greece* for instance, written in 1932, left the sexual aspects of Plato vague, focusing instead on the intellectual elements of pederasty in which 'the really good teacher[...]and pupil must do their best by mutual love and common effort to reach the greatest perfection possible'.<sup>21</sup> The only remaining ambiguity in Licht's version is his appropriation of the image of 'love', which may or may not be intended to signal eroticism. In contrast, Eglington's *Greek Love*, written in 1964, appropriates Plato to justify the social value of what Eglington terms 'boy-love'. It is not surprising then to find that, though less so than Licht, he too plays down the sexual possibilities, claiming that, 'where sex occurred at all it

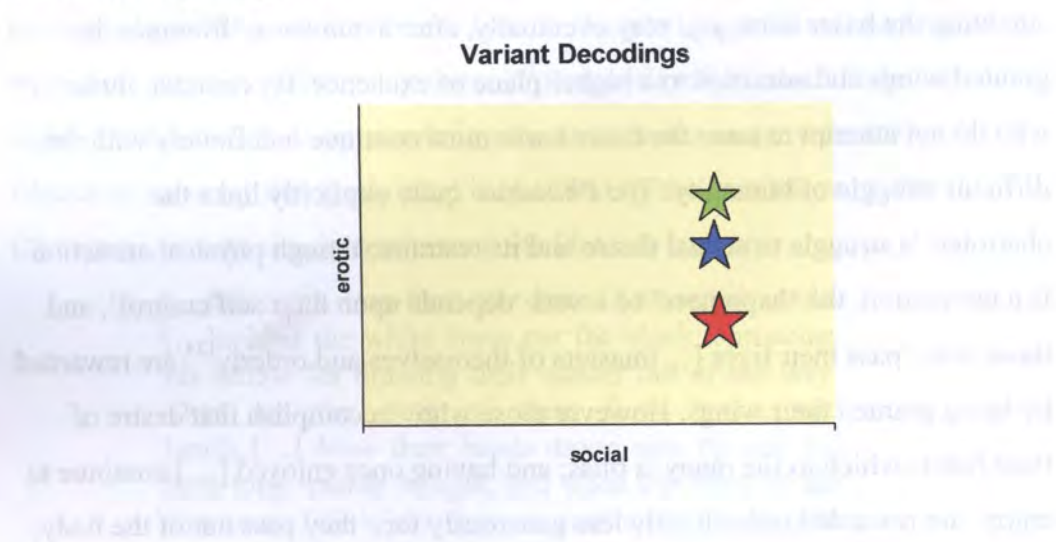
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<sup>19</sup> Plato, 'The Symposium', in *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, ed. by Candace Ward (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), pp.1-43 (p.11). All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text. I have chosen to use the Benjamin Jowett translation because it is the one with which Renault herself was most familiar. It is interesting that this translation is one of the most ambiguous, for, unlike some older translations it refers to physical desire but, unlike some later translations does not make it fully sexual.

<sup>20</sup> David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>21</sup> Hans Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece*, trans. by J.H. Fresse, ed. by Lawrence Dawson, (London: Panther, 1968), p.430.

was only as a part of the much larger complex of shared confidences, shared experiences, love given and received.’<sup>22</sup> The ‘at all’ and ‘only’ work to contain the eroticism and emphasise the secondary role of sex. A more sexual appropriation was offered by J.K. Dover’s *Greek Homosexuality* in 1978; he writes that Platonic texts suggest that the younger man may ‘decide to grant his erastes [lover] a favour, but he himself has no sensual incentive to do so’.<sup>23</sup> In this context the ‘favour’ is clearly a sexual one but the erotic connotations are limited by his insistence that there exists no reciprocal desire. All three of these commentators appropriate Plato’s ambiguous texts differently through their variant decodings. These divergent decodings can be compared using my simple chart (below). Licht’s decoding is shown by the red star, Eglington’s by the blue star and Dover’s by the green.



Whilst each commentator has retained the social aspects of pederasty, Licht’s ideological perspective has led him to focus on its educative value, Eglington’s has encouraged his admission of its sexual possibilities, and Dover’s has led to both his recognition of sexual possibilities and his careful separation of them from modern ideals of reciprocity. In each of these cases the gap between the ambiguities suggested by Plato and the explanation offered by the appropriate writer reveals something about that writer’s perspective. Similarly Mary Renault’s *The Charioteer* offers us an appropriation of Plato’s ambiguities

<sup>22</sup> J.Z. Eglington, *Greek Love* (New York: Oliver Layton Press, 1964), p.8.

<sup>23</sup> J.K. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978), p.97.



which brings them in line with her own ideologies surrounding interpersonal attraction.

Within *The Charioteer* Renault makes many explicit appropriations of Plato's texts; from the moment when Ralph presents Laurie with his copy of the *Phaedrus*, Plato is a constant presence. The most explicit references are of course to the myth of the charioteer after which the text is named. The Platonic myth of the charioteer describes the tripartite division of the human soul into a good horse, a bad horse, and the charioteer who attempts to drive them. The good horse symbolises all that is noble in the human soul, the bad horse symbolises the baser instincts and the charioteer symbolises the struggle to create harmony from conflicting impulses. Plato suggests that virtuous souls succeed in taming or subduing the baser horse and may eventually, after a number of lifetimes, be granted wings and admitted to a higher plane of existence. By contrast, those who do not attempt to tame the baser horse must continue indefinitely with the difficult struggle of humanity. The *Phaedrus* quite explicitly links the charioteer's struggle to sexual desire and its restraint; though physical attraction is a temptation, the 'happiness' of lovers 'depends upon their self control', and those who 'pass their lives [...]masters of themselves and orderly'<sup>24</sup> are rewarded by being granted their wings. However those who 'accomplish that desire of their hearts which to the many is bliss; and having once enjoyed [...] continue to enjoy' are rewarded only slightly less generously for, 'they pass out of the body, unwinged, but eager to soar, and thus obtain no mean reward of love and madness' (*Phaedrus* p.70). In this respect, though erotic indulgence is certainly not represented as the ideal, neither is it disastrous; Plato appears to suggest that the worst thing for the human soul is never to experience love or philosophy at all.

Platonic commentators such as Bowra and Finley have tended to insist that the myth of the Charioteer highlights Plato's ideal of a life led only by the

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<sup>24</sup> Plato, 'Phaedrus', in *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, ed. by Candace Ward (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), pp.45-92 (p.70). All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text.

intellect.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, critics have consistently taken this perspective and from the early commentator John Addington Symonds, who understands the *Phaedrus* as suggesting that 'a noble life can only be attained by passionate friends bound together in the chains of close yet *temperate* comradeship',<sup>26</sup> to the more recent Zilboorg who understands Plato's message as being, 'to strive for purity',<sup>27</sup> the element which is highlighted in Plato's myth is restraint with little attention paid to the more erotic possibility which offers 'no mean reward' (*Phaedrus* p.70) for love and desire. In contrast to the scholarly interpretations of Bowra, Finley, Symonds and Zilboorg, Renault chooses to focus on the eroticised possibility which she appropriates for two of her heroes, Ralph and Laurie. These two men, like the erotically active lovers characterised by the *Phaedrus* as having 'given and taken from each other the most sacred of pledges' (p.70), have also exchanged promises. As Ralph tells Laurie: 'You belong with me. As long as we're both alive, [...] that's a promise.'<sup>28</sup> Renault's reflection of Plato here highlights her interest in appropriating the more erotic imagery from Plato's *Phaedrus*, however this erotic ideal is qualified by the conclusion of *The Charioteer*; a coda clearly constructed via Platonic imagery.

[...]the reins drop from the driver's loosened hands.  
 [...]neither the white horse nor the black reproaches  
 his fellow for drawing their master out of the way.  
 They are far, both of them from home, and  
 lonely,[...] Now their heads droop side by side till  
 their long manes mingle, and when the voice of the  
 charioteer falls silent they are reconciled for a night  
 in sleep. (TC p.399).

In Renault's imaginative extrapolation neither the base black horse nor the noble white one is solely responsible for the difficult journey, rather they are both at fault. In the appropriation that Renault makes of Plato's erotic possibilities the sublimation suggested by Plato's ideal is re-encoded as just as destructive as the excess eroticism symbolised by the black horse. Renault's recontextualisation of the charioteer myth, which recasts Plato's suggestion that it is only the baser,

<sup>25</sup> M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (London: Penguin Books, 1987); C.M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959).

<sup>26</sup> John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion* (London: n. pub., 1901), p.51. Emphasis mine.

<sup>27</sup> Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault*, p.111.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Renault, *The Charioteer* (London: Longmans Green, 1953), p.338. All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text following the abbreviation TC.

more erotic, elements which need subduing, implies an ideological commitment to a combination of eroticism and moderation. The gap that exists between Renault's erotic appropriation of Plato and the more traditional scholarly focus on sublimation and restraint suggests that it would be informative to consider *The Charioteer's* attitude towards sexless relationships and hence elucidate the ideological perspectives which inform its representation of same sex love.

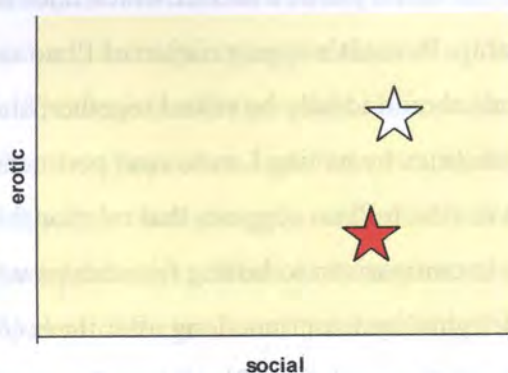
As I have already mentioned, the Greek institution of pederasty is frequently appropriated to represent an erotic but sexless relationship between an older and younger man. Renault uses the relationship between Laurie and Andrew to explore this possibility. That Renault encodes this relationship as pederastic is suggested by several images. Firstly, Andrew casts Laurie as his teacher, claiming, 'you could tell me so much that I ought to know' (TC p.83). Secondly, the difference in their ages is highlighted when Andrew admits his feelings of extreme admiration are 'adolescent' (TC p.86) in nature. Thirdly, Andrew is innocent of erotic knowledge, being unaware of the term 'queer' (TC p.61) and seeming completely oblivious to the erotic component of Laurie's desire. Within Renault's text this kind of pederasty is 'something not quite real', 'the reduction to absurdity of romantic daydreams' (TC p.345). It may be 'love' (TC p.62) but it is not what Renault presents as the erotic ideal, which is fulfilled only by Ralph and Laurie whose interaction is based on more equal terms: as Ralph reminds Laurie, 'how much of the truth about yourself have you ever been able to tell [Andrew]?' (TC p.346). It appears that Renault rejects pederasty as an ideal because it can never be a truly reciprocal relationship. Here again it is possible to detect a gap between the way Platonic elements are usually interpreted and Renault's specific appropriations. Traditional academic readings of Plato centralise the pederastic images claiming that in the classical ideal 'the relation had to be hierarchical [...] to be deemed respectable'.<sup>29</sup> However Renault's use of Platonic imagery has already directed me to other possibilities and her resituation of pederasty as secondary suggests another selective appropriation of Plato's charioteer myth. The *Phaedrus* suggests that those partners who sublimate desire share pederastic relationships in which the

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<sup>29</sup> Halperin, *One hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p.47

younger man though ‘bursting with passion’ naively believes his passion to be friendship only (*Phaedrus* p.70). This is clearly the situation that Renault appropriates for Laurie and Andrew, an ideal she chooses to reject for its inevitable inequality which makes reciprocal desire impossible. By contrast, the erotically active partners whose image Renault appropriates for Laurie and Ralph, are characterised by the *Phaedrus* as those who share their desire on an equal level ‘happy companions in their pilgrimage’ (*Phaedrus* p.70). Renault appropriates both sexless pederasty and more erotic possibilities from Plato, yet her re-encoding situates reciprocal eroticism rather than pederasty as ideal. Thus the difference between traditional readings of Plato and Renault’s re-encoding highlights her commitment to interpreting Plato through ideologies of reciprocity. At this point I can once again use the chart to discuss the appropriations that Renault makes. This time, I have placed a red star to represent the traditional apprehension of male relationships in Plato’s texts; this position relies on social cues and minimises erotic ones situating pederasty as primarily a social rather than sexual institution. The white star places Renault’s appropriation next to that; here the traditional reading has been rejected in favour of a reading which emphasises erotic possibilities through which both social and erotic cues are read for reciprocity.

#### Decoding Plato



Thus far I have discussed how Renault’s appropriative strategies work within her text to suggest that an ideal sexual and erotic relationship is only possible between equals, however, as suggested by her rejection of the inequalities of

pederasty, it is not only on the erotic plane that Renault's appropriations betray her commitment to reciprocity.

Laurie's act of giving his copy of the *Phaedrus* to Andrew is symbolic of Renault's choice to centralise Platonic imagery other than the asymmetrical pederasty the *Phaedrus* is so well known for. Despite the fact that commentators on Greek history generally highlight the pederastic relationships in Plato's dialogues this is not, as I have already mentioned, the only image they offer. Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* describes a possibility far more compatible with the ideals of reciprocity and equality that interested Renault. Aristophanes claims that when two men come together who each possess one half of an originary soul they share a permanent relationship which combines 'love and friendship and intimacy' (*Symposium* p.17). This offers for appropriation an image in which reciprocity and mutuality extend across a spectrum of affective relationships, from the social to the sexual. It is no surprise then that Renault uses the images offered by Aristophanes to encode Ralph and Laurie's relationship. It is his image of two individuals who share a single soul which underpins the representation of Renault's two heroes who know things about one another 'without being told' (*TC* p.344) and whose coming together 'seemed inevitable' (*TC* p.349). The erotic and the social are importantly linked; Andrew and Laurie's ability to share, even at the level of friendship is impaired by their inequality on the erotic plane, a barrier which does not impede Ralph and Laurie's relationship. Renault's appropriation of Plato is used to suggest that social and sexual bonds should ideally be yoked together; she draws the reader's attention to such possibilities by having Laurie read pertinent sections of the *Phaedrus* (*TC* p.117) in which Plato suggests that relationships based only on passion are transitory in comparison to lasting friendships which 'are not lessened by sensual delights' and continue long after them (*Phaedrus* p.50). It is interesting that Plato puts the emphasis of long term love on friendship rather than sexual attraction, indeed his is an image in which erotic elements, whilst enjoyable, are not central to any lasting relationship. This returns us to the first appropriation Renault made from the charioteer myth, for it is consistent with ideologies in which eroticism is tempered with moderation. Here again Renault's distinctive appropriations start to reveal the ideologies which inform them. At

this point it would be informative to consider where else in Renault's culture these ideologies might have been prevalent.

Despite their representation of sexual relationships between men, Carolyn Heilman claims that the one thing Renault's novels are not about is homosexuality.<sup>30</sup> Indeed the ideological perspective of Renault's *The Charioteer* is so different from that expressed in many homosexual subcultures that at least one critic has accused her text of 'homophobia' noting 'its utter disdain for the homosexual subculture that it depicts'.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps this disdain originated in the fact that the homosexual subcultures Renault knew did not appear compatible with the ideologies that her appropriations of Plato suggest she espoused. Moderated eroticism, reciprocity and social and sexual mutuality are all elements that Renault depicts homosexual subcultures as lacking. She condemns what she seems to see as the indiscriminate eroticism of subcultural groups where 'a queer party' is characterised as 'something between a lonely hearts club and an amateur brothel' (*TC* p.360). She disapproves of the subcultural world in which men 'keep together' even though they 'don't feel anything in common with each other' and may even 'hate' one another (*TC* p.176). This world is quite a contrast to Renault's ideal in which an erotic relationship is underpinned by mutual respect and a soul deep similarity. Given the gap between Renault's own ideologies, as revealed by her appropriative choices, and the ideologies she perceived as underpinning the subcultural world, it is no surprise that she has her heroes look for alternatives, and depicts each man as a 'solitary still making his own map' (*TC* p.135). The decisions Ralph and Laurie make are based on appropriations from Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, in which sexuality appears to have formed only a small part of a wider intellectual, philosophical and affective [homo]social network. Whether Renault's attitude and the appropriations it inspired can be considered 'homophobic' is questionable. It is not the homosexual act that Renault has problems with, for she chooses to emphasise the erotics of Plato's dialogues, but rather her problem is with the way

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<sup>30</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun, 'Axiothea's Grief: The Disability of the Female Imagination', in *From Parnassus*, ed. by Dora B. Weiner and William R. Keylor (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1976) pp.227-236.

<sup>31</sup> Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990), p.157.

this act is integrated, or more specifically fails to be integrated, into society. Renault is very specific about the social integrations she sees as ideal, for she rejects both 1940s subcultures and Greek pederasty, replacing both with other Platonic possibilities, ones that emphasise mutuality and weave sexual interaction into the broader structures of friendship and intimacy. 'It is not what one is, it's what one does with it' (TC p.152) Laurie insists, and it can be seen across the genre of literature explored here, that what many female writers are 'doing with it' differs dramatically from the approaches of many modern homosexual writers. Renault rejected the homosexual identities contemporary to her novel and suggested new ideologies, many appropriated from Plato, their salience to her a result of the way in which they resonated with ideologies she had already internalised from other sources.

### Drawing Parallels

Renault felt that it was important that the historical novelist did not ignore historical fact; however, she was also interested in the way in which the modern reader feels an empathy towards historical sources. This she explained by insisting that, 'universals of human feeling thread their way among the accidents of custom and belief which like rocks and shallows divert their course but do not change their essence.'<sup>32</sup> Through this kind of universal empathy Renault felt that the appropriative reader could find resonances within the source texts that inspired them. This kind of relationship is summarised well by Ruth Hobermann who writes that 'there is a complex interaction among the events and issues offered' by a source product and 'the novelist's experiences and most important, the novelist's own cultural discourses'.<sup>33</sup> Renault's novel then is as much about World War Two and Plato as it is about her own 'cultural discourses', interpretive communities and ideologies. Renault's selective appropriations of Plato are not misinterpretations or inaccurate readings of Plato, rather they suggest areas which gained salience to Renault due to their compatibility with

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Renault, 'History in Fiction', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 March 1973, p.316.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth Century Women's Historical Fiction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.3.



her own ideologies. Renault's texts, that Kopelson rejects as 'misreadings'<sup>34</sup> of the classics, are in fact dynamic examples of how her ideologies have shaped the appropriative strategies she uses.

Renault's ideologies appear to reflect several prominent cultural discourses of the time. Within feminist and lesbian communities of the 1950s, Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was not only influential, but probably reflected perspectives rising to prominence prior to its publication in 1953, the same year as *The Charioteer*. *The Second Sex*, although speaking of female same sex relationships rather than male ones, has an investment in reciprocity similar to that suggested by Renault's Platonic appropriations. *The Second Sex* suggests that same sex partners can 'enjoy their love in a state of equality, because the partners are homogenous, basically alike'.<sup>35</sup> For Renault it is only Ralph and Laurie, united in their reciprocal desire, coming together with 'instinctive purpose' (*TC* p.337) who can share this equality and achieve the Platonic ideal of 'becoming one' (*Symposium* p.17). De Beauvoir's text also represents as ideal the integration of the erotic with wider affiliative bonds, an ideal which is familiar from *The Charioteer* in which Renault insists that one's partner should be someone to whom 'there seemed nothing that could not be told' (*TC* p.178). De Beauvoir describes relationships in which 'carnal affection' has 'more continuity', in which lovers 'are not carried away in frenetic ecstasies, but [...] never sink back into hostile indifference'.<sup>36</sup> This parallels Renault's ideal of a moderated eroticism and has clear resonances with Plato's representation of friendship which 'is not lessened by sensual delights' (*Phaedrus* p.50). Thus it is easy to see how certain elements of Plato's texts may well have appeared to speak to Renault via the ideologies she had internalised from her culture. It was these elements, that Renault chose to appropriate in an act of re-encoding, which yoked Plato to her own ideals.

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<sup>34</sup> Kevin Kopelson, *Love's Litany: The Writing of Modern Homoerotics* (California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.118.

<sup>35</sup> Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. and trans. by H.M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), p.409.

<sup>36</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 36.



Renault's practice of drawing parallels between her own society and historical texts could lead to the accusation of essentialism. However rather than undermine the interpretive practices of different communities it is perhaps better to view this as an example of the differing ideologies which characterise academic and fictional writing. Although the occasional academic, such as Rictor Norton, espouses a view that homosexuality is a 'broad stream' which runs through history,<sup>37</sup> and the historian, Dithly did famously recommend that historians should 'locate the I in the thou',<sup>38</sup> the more usual consensus is that academics should attempt to avoid 'viewing the ancient documents through the prism of modern social and sexual categories'.<sup>39</sup> Renault's contrasting assumption that there are 'universals of human feeling'<sup>40</sup> is echoed by another historical novelist Pat Barker who claims that her texts focus on 'what there [is] in human nature that doesn't change'.<sup>41</sup> On one level this apparent essentialism may be accounted for by what Georg Lukács calls the 'necessary anachronism' of historical fiction which allows its world to be comprehensible to the modern reader.<sup>42</sup> However I believe that more fundamentally it is a result of an appropriative reading strategy which draws on the resonances it finds within its source material. This reading strategy is discouraged in traditional academia, where readers who unproblematically view historical texts in modern terms are considered naïve, but it is central to the ideologies and interpretive practices of the appropriative writer. This does not, of course, mean that there are necessarily universals in human nature, just that the act of interpretation frequently involves locating the 'I in the thou'. My assertion here offers a contrast to Iser's early work on the processes of reading in which he suggested that, 'it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him.'<sup>43</sup> Possibly Iser is describing the practice of the casual reader which may be distinct from that of the

<sup>37</sup> Norton, *The Myth of The Modern Homosexual*, p.13.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Bently, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.87.

<sup>39</sup> Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p.9.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Renault 'History in Fiction' *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 March 1973, p.316.

<sup>41</sup> Wera Reusch, 'A backdoor into the Present: an Interview with Pat Barker'

<[http://www.lolapress.org/elec1/artenglish/reus\\_e.htm](http://www.lolapress.org/elec1/artenglish/reus_e.htm)>.

<sup>42</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1965).

<sup>43</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.282.

appropriative reader, however there is no doubt that in Renault's case the 'adventure' of literature is fully informed by her own familiar world.

The ideals which I have traced in *The Charioteer*, the integration of the sexual into wider social bonds, the emphasis on reciprocity and oneness and a moderated eroticism, were revisited by Renault nearly 20 years later in the appropriative decisions which inform her Alexander novels. The similarities between these and *The Charioteer* are even more striking when you consider the ways in which the cultural scene changed during the intervening years. The battles fought for homosexual law reform succeeded and in 1967 'homosexual acts between consenting adults in private'<sup>44</sup> were finally legalised. There was a hugely increased public awareness of homosexuality and by the end of the 1960s 'magazines, newspapers, television, radio, books, plays and movies discussed male homosexuality and to a lesser extent lesbianism, and presented images of gay life that reached a wide audience'.<sup>45</sup> There were now non-pornographic magazines aimed at gay men and women which provided a place for sharing ideological beliefs and debating rights and politics. Of these publications, one in particular impacted on Mary Renault. The 'Daughters of Bilitis', a lesbian society set up in 1955, published a monthly magazine called *The Ladder* to which Renault subscribed and indeed sometimes contributed. However despite these dramatic cultural changes, consistent patterns of appropriation link Renault's *Fire from Heaven* and *The Persian Boy* with her much earlier novel, *The Charioteer*, not least of which being that all three books make use of close knit homosocial communities as representational backdrops.

### Alexander: Eroticising Ambiguities

The history of Alexander's sex life is, rather like Plato's texts, ambiguous. It is commonplace for historians to comment upon Alexander's apparent lack of interest in sexual matters and to discuss the possibility of a sexual interpretation of the intimacy he shared with his companion

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<sup>44</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1970), p.269.

<sup>45</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.218.

Hephaistion.<sup>46</sup> No doubt due to these ambiguities, interpretations of Alexander's life are particularly likely to demonstrate the ways in which the interpreter's culture affects their decoding. With no certainties to guide them the decoder is inevitably tempted to impose their own ideological perspective on the source. For instance, literary critic Neil McEwan sees the relationship between Alexander and his love slave Bagoas as intrinsically 'perverse'<sup>47</sup> a term which given that such relationships were common and unremarkable in Alexander's own time, can only have reflected McEwan's personal ideologies. Renault's appropriative interpretation of Alexander's life, though couched in less reactive terms, is no less a reflection of her own ideologies. As in *The Charioteer*, the appropriations and re-encodings she makes for Alexander's history highlight erotic possibilities, but not without keeping a strong focus on the deeper affiliative bonds linking the protagonists and emphasising an ideal of mental unity. There are two love stories told in the Alexander novels, the first occurs between Alexander and Hephaistion and the second develops later between Alexander and his eunuch slave Bagoas. First I shall consider the better known of these relationships, Alexander and Hephaistion.

Renault's novels make several appropriations of well documented historical events, and one of these is an incident in which the Persian Queen Mother upon seeing Alexander and Hephaistion together assumes that Hephaistion is the king and prostrates herself before him rather than before Alexander. Instead of taking offence Alexander reputedly claimed the mistake was of no consequence because Hephaistion too was Alexander. This incident can be made to imply many different things depending upon the exact context of its re-encoding. In Arrian's re-encoding in his *The Campaigns of Alexander*, which is one of the secondary historical sources through which Renault herself appropriated Alexander's life, the incident is related without apparent inference of eroticism. Here when the Queen Mother prostrated herself before Hephaistion 'Alexander merely remarked that her error was of no account, for Hephaistion

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<sup>46</sup> W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great: Sources and Studies II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948); R.D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London: Robert Hale, 1968).

<sup>47</sup> Neil McEwan, *Perspective in British Historical Fiction Today* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p.72.

too was an “Alexander” - a protector of men’.<sup>48</sup> In this account, Alexander’s justification, whilst it suggests Hephaistion and he share a degree of social intimacy, is based upon the meaning of their names rather than any claim to particular interpersonal closeness. What is more, Arrian’s historical text does not appear to suggest that Hephaistion was Alexander’s lover and thus the incident is not embedded within a context of erotic intimacy. In 1975, Renault herself wrote a biographical study of Alexander the Great entitled *The Nature of Alexander*. Whilst this text is full of speculation, it is not a work of fiction. Here the same incident is re-encoded differently and now, upon realising the mistake, Alexander replies: ‘Never mind,[...] You made no mistake, he too is Alexander.’<sup>49</sup> This rendition in which Hephaistion is not ‘an Alexander’ but simply ‘Alexander’ significantly increases the apparent intimacy, as it now seems Alexander is claiming Hephaistion to be his second self, rather than making a play on the meaning of their names. However the eroticism of that intimacy is limited, for Renault’s biographical text, although it suggests that Alexander and Hephaistion might have been lovers, never insists upon it. It is only in the context of her fictional work *The Persian Boy* that this incident is re-encoded as fully erotic. Although the words ‘he is Alexander too’ on p.40 and ‘he too is Alexander’ on p.118<sup>50</sup> are almost identical to those of Renault’s biography of Alexander, the context is such that the intimacy of the statement is presented as evidence of erotic involvement. Bagoas, Alexander’s eunuch slave, recalling the mistaken identity incident, wonders ‘how long must those two have been lovers to behave like that? [...]not even from her [the Queen Mother] had he troubled to hide it’.(TPB p.118).

Each subsequent appropriation of the same incident re-encodes it in new ways: Arrian’s text contains the cues for social intimacy, Renault’s biography adds interpersonal intimacy to those cues, and Renault’s fiction uses the same cues resituated in a new context to support her representation of erotic intimacy. An interesting contrast to Renault’s apparent strategy of highlighting the

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<sup>48</sup> Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. by Aubrey De Selincourt, ed. by J.R. Hamilton (London: Penguin, 1987), p.123.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Renault, *The Nature of Alexander* (London: Allen lane, 1975), p.96.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Renault, *The Persian Boy* (1972 repr. London: Penguin, 1974) All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text following the abbreviation TPB.

interpersonal intimacy behind one of the world's most famous friendships is provided by Lukács who writes that such friendships 'are much better explained by the large objective connections than by mere biographical psychology'.<sup>51</sup> Lukács' approach, of understanding relationships in terms of social politics and philosophy, demonstrates very different interpretive ideologies to Renault's. Again I can compare these strategies on a chart. Here Lukács' approach is shown by the red star, Arrian's by the blue star, Renault's biographical approach by the green star, and her fictional approach by the white star

#### Decoding Friendship



Each recontextualization of the same incident provides a different balance of erotic and social cues, with Renault's texts in particular yoking social cues to erotic ones. In her fictional text, 'he too is Alexander' becomes far more literal, appearing to reference the Platonic ideal of united souls, an appropriation which extends Renault's commitments to both reciprocity and a union based upon mental as well as physical compatibility.

Renault's Greek novels, though less explicitly than *The Charioteer*, make numerous appropriations from Platonic sources. The most central of these is Renault's use of the myth described in the *Symposium* by Aristophanes through which she re-encodes Alexander and Hephaistion's love. Aristophanes tells of how 'the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of two'. these doubly sexed people, however, angered the gods and as retribution Zeus 'cut them in two' (*Symposium* p.15 and p.16) creating the single sexed human race but leaving each individual

<sup>51</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p.306.

searching for their original other half. Aristophanes goes on to describe the search for their other halves which is undertaken by the men who were a section of the original male.

the men who were a section of the male follow the male, and while they are young, being a piece of the man, they hang about him and embrace him[...]And when they reach manhood they are lovers of youth[...]And when one of them finds his other half, whether he be a lover of youth or a lover of another sort, the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy [...]:These are they who pass their lives with one another. (*Symposium* p.17)

Clearly the first two possibilities describe the traditional pederastic relationship, whilst the final possibility describes something more permanent. It will not be surprising to find that Renault appropriates the latter imagery to describe Alexander and Hephaistion whom Ptolemy notes in *Fire From Heaven* are like 'one soul in two bodies as the sophist put it'.<sup>52</sup> Though Renault uses Aristophanes' myth to support a relationship she clearly envisages as life long rather than pederastic, it is interesting to note how historians and critics have often drawn on the same myth, and hence the same cues, to support their thesis that pederasty was the universal model of homoerotic attraction in ancient Greece. Halperin claims that 'as Aristophanes portrays it – reciprocal erotic desire among males is unknown'; he never mentions the second half of Aristophanes' speech.<sup>53</sup> Other historians have tried to explain away the speech as 'a comic curiosity'<sup>54</sup> and claimed that to read Aristophanes' speech for mutuality and reciprocity, as Renault does is either 'anachronistic'<sup>55</sup> or a 'romantic symbolic misreading'.<sup>56</sup> The contrast between Renault's appropriative choices and those made by critical historians is yet another example of how differing reading communities, interpretive paradigms and ideologies affect decoding and re-encoding.

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<sup>52</sup> Mary Renault, *Fire from Heaven* (London: Longman, 1970), p.175. All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text following the abbreviation FFH.

<sup>53</sup> Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p.20.

<sup>54</sup> A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.225.

<sup>55</sup> Price, *Love and Friendship*, p.225.

<sup>56</sup> Eglington, *Greek Love*, 1964, p.135.

Rather as she does in *The Charioteer*, Renault uses Platonic appropriations, this time mainly from *The Symposium*, to represent a relationship which combines physical and mental union, a combination suggested by Aristophanes' linking of 'love, friendship and intimacy' (*Symposium* p.17). Like those men lucky enough to find their other halves Alexander and Hephaistion are encoded as both best friends and lovers: 'True friends' who 'share everything' (*FFH* p.175), their love 'as public as a marriage' (*TPB* p.150). This juxtaposition of friendship and erotic attraction is clearly troubling to critics such as Kevin Kopelson who tries to explain it by suggesting that, 'to accommodate and expropriate conventional friendship[...] [Renault] lets us imagine that Alexander and Hephaistion do not sleep together that much.'<sup>57</sup> It is true that Alexander is portrayed as sexually 'warm, not hot' (*TPB* p.250), an image in keeping with Renault's ideal of moderated eroticism, but Hephaistion certainly feels sexual desire for Alexander; he is like a 'hungry' 'leopard' (*FFH* p.212) whose thoughts are coloured by 'clouds of longing' (*FFH* p.219). Alexander, though his desire for sex is perhaps more mental than physical, nonetheless answers Hephaistion's question 'It is what you really want?' with the reassurance, 'you should know that.' (*FFH* p.219). Kopelson extends his insistence that sexual desire is counter indicative of friendship to the relationship between Bagoas and Alexander claiming that conforming to the 'conventional notion that friends do not even want to have sex together, Bagoas does not desire Alexander'.<sup>58</sup> This is I feel a rather surprising extrapolation about a character who claims 'I will have him, if I die for it' (*TPB* p.134). The problem appears to be that Renault's ideologies are simply incompatible with Kopelson's: Renault's use of friendship images reflects her belief that in an ideal relationship friendship and desire are mutually intensifying, rather than, as Kopelson suggests, mutually incompatible. Renault's appropriations from Plato demonstrate her continuing interest in exploring the possibilities for a friendship which happily embraces an erotic element.

Renault's depiction of the love between Bagoas and Alexander consistently reflects her reaction against hegemonic ideologies that suggest 'love

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<sup>57</sup> Kopelson, *Love's Litany*, p.120.

<sup>58</sup> Kopelson, *Love's Litany*, p.122.



and friendship' are 'distinct, if not oppositional, categories'.<sup>59</sup> Her appropriation of the role of the Greek 'beloved' or *eromenos*, the socially inferior partner in a pederastic relationship, stands in direct opposition to the critical consensus which has tended to desexualise this role informing us that the *eromenos* was not motivated by any 'sensual incentive' and did not feel any 'passionate sexual desire'.<sup>60</sup> According to most academics, if the *eromenos* chose to have sex with his lover it was at best a favour granted a friend, at worst a kind of social obligation. By contrast, when Renault re-encodes the image of the beloved youth in Bagoas, she eroticises his role, a recontextualisation in line with her ideological commitment to reciprocity both mental and physical. Bagoas is the perfect candidate for the role of the *eromenos* being youthful and boyish in looks even as an adult due to his castration. Bagoas, however closely he outwardly fits the profile of *eromenos*, is certainly not free from sexual motivation. Watching Alexander walk away from him he swears, 'I will have him, if I die for it.' (*TPB* p.134) The starkly sexual term 'have' hardly credits Bagoas with any other motive than the sensual. And lest the reader should think his sexual possessiveness a form of social climbing Renault has him claim, 'as for power, I wanted that over one heart alone', Alexander's (*TPB* p.178). Not only is Bagoas motivated by sexual desire, claiming that 'when desire begins to fail it will be a day of grief' (*TPB* p.231), but his desire is motivated not by social convention but by love; his is a desire to possess not material goods but 'hearts'. Renault's resituation of the role of *eromenos* emphasises her interest in representing a fully reciprocal erotic relationship in which both partners, despite the difference of their social standing, share not just sex, but love and friendship.

At least one of the fictional details through which Renault re-encodes Bagoas and Alexander is a direct appropriation from Plato's *Symposium*, one which demonstrates Renault's contradiction of traditional readings which have insisted that only the lover or *erastes* 'might initiate a sexual act'.<sup>61</sup> I have already mentioned the appropriative possibilities of this moment in my

<sup>59</sup> Kopelson, *Love's Litany*, p.138. Kopelson adds that it is harder to separate friendship and sexual attraction than it seems.

<sup>60</sup> Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p.97; David M. Halperin, 'Questions of Evidence: Commentary on Koehl, De Vries and Williams', in *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, ed. by Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp.39-54 (p.47).

<sup>61</sup> Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p.47.



introduction; it concerns the attempt by the *eromenos* Alcibiades to seduce his *erastes* Socrates. Renault's Alexander, who 'liked to show himself a man of iron, above pleasure' (*TPB* p.40) has many parallels with Socrates who was famed for his 'natural temperance and self-restraint' (*Symposium* p.40). Bagoas is similar to Alcibiades in that both are young men famed for their beauty, and Bagoas' seduction of Alexander in *The Persian Boy* is highly reminiscent of Alcibiades' of Socrates, except for one crucial difference, that Bagoas succeeds. In this way Renault appropriates the image and possibility from Plato but within her context the ambiguously social but suggestive cues become fully eroticised. Here is Alcibiades' attempted seduction from the *Symposium*:

Without waiting to hear more I got up and throwing my cloak about him crept under his threadbare cloak[...]and there I lay during the whole night having this wonderful monster in my arms[...]and yet not withstanding all this, he was so contemptuous and derisive and disdainful of my beauty that in the morning when I awoke[...]I arose as from the couch of a father or elder brother. (p.40)

And for comparison, Bagoas' from *The Persian Boy*:

Without respect for the sacred person of a King, I put both arms round his neck.

That was the end of his pretences. Now here I stood, in the sole embrace which, out of so many, I had ever worked to get. [...] All I wished to tell him was, I have only this one thing in the world to give you, but that is going to be the best you ever had. Just take it, that is all. (*TPB* p.138)

Renault's first sentence contains similar cues to Plato's: her 'without respect' establishes Bagoas' lower status and impatience in much the same way as Alcibiades' 'without waiting' does. In Renault's description of the ensuing embrace, 'both arms' functions to contrast the inferior social position with a daring erotic advance much as Plato's 'throwing my cloak about him' does. In Renault's version however unambiguous erotic cues are added to the ambiguous social cues appropriated from Plato. Renault's fictionalised seduction is saturated with images of having and taking which tend to enhance our sense of Bagoas' sexual motivation. By contrast Plato leaves us uncertain of Alcibiades' motives, which may be either arrogance or the pangs of philosophy; certainly Plato does

not overtly denote erotic desire; it is only connoted for the modern reader by the events that the text describes. During the seduction Bagoas speaks of ‘the happy harmony of our souls’ (*TPB* p.140), intimate words connoting reciprocity and sharing, cues which contrast dramatically to the distance implied by Plato’s ‘contemptuous’ and ‘disdainful’. Thus the image of the *eromenos* seducing his *erastes*, which Renault appropriated from the *Symposium*, re-encodes the incident into a successful sexual relationship recasting the whole connotive structure so that it becomes part of a larger plot involving intimacy, eroticism and reciprocity.

Just as Bagoas’ own relationship is used to encode reciprocity, Bagoas’ apprehension of other character’s relationships functions to direct the reader towards interpreting textual cues along the lines Renault intended. For instance Bagoas directs the reader towards interpreting the social bonds of friendship as indicative of desire. Waiting in Alexander’s tent he sees Hephaistion ruffling Alexander’s hair ‘as a man does with a boy’ (*TPB* p.116), and watches Hephaistion reading over Alexander’s shoulder and teasing Alexander about his lack of ability to learn Greek. All of these are cues that might be indicative only of friendship, but Bagoas has ‘understood’ (*TPB* p.116) he asks himself, ‘how long must those two have been lovers, to behave like that, to talk like that?’ (*TPB* p.118). To make the interpretation he does, Bagoas must read social cues as support for erotic decodings. In this way Bagoas functions as Renault’s mouthpiece insisting upon an understanding in which these two, the social and the erotic, are crucially linked. Bagoas, and the reader, must also interpret the erotic relationships, not as pederastic, but as reciprocal. Initially Bagoas thinks in the simplistic pederastic terms of ‘boy’ and ‘man’. On first seeing Alexander and Hephaistion together he situates Alexander as the ‘boy’, thinking disgustedly ‘he is somebody’s boy himself’. (*TPB* p.118). Gradually Bagoas comes to understand the relationship as more reciprocal and equal reflecting after Hephaistion’s death that Alexander and Hephaistion ‘had been born in the same month, in the same hills, of the same race, with the same gods; had lived under one roof from their fourteenth year. [...]to how much I had been a stranger’ (*TPB* p.388). In highlighting Bagoas’ misunderstanding of Alexander and Hephaistion’s relationship Renault draws the reader’s attention to other

possibilities, appropriating Greek history for the representation, not of pederasty, but of a relationship that combines Aristophanes' ideal of 'love' 'as public as a marriage' (*TPB* p.150) 'friendship', in which two men are 'everything to one another' (*FFH* p.218) and 'intimacy' for between Hephaistion's hands, 'had been laid, in trust, Alexander's pride'. (*FFH* p.219). Aristophanes' ideal of a reciprocal relationship combining 'love friendship and intimacy' (*Symposium* p.17) is one which is so harmonious with Renault's own that it could be said to encapsulate the distinctive ways in which Renault's appropriative strategy in *Fire From Heaven* and *The Persian Boy* as well as *The Charioteer* works to resituate appropriated images.

### Plato as a 'Feminist' Text

By the time Renault published her Alexander novels, the ideologies that she appeared to espouse in *The Charioteer* were much more widely circulated and thus the resonances between the ideological discourses she was likely to have been exposed to and her appropriative strategy are even more apparent. Although Renault does not overtly do any of the things modern day critics Laura Doan and Sarah Waters suggest that lesbian writers of historical fiction should do,<sup>62</sup> her texts, even though they appropriate male sources, are informed by the ideologies of the feminist and lesbian communities that she was a part of. Indeed, the salience that she gives to certain Platonic images can clearly be linked to the discourses which surrounded her. One might think Plato's homosocial world, in which both the social and the erotic life is structured around interactions between men, is an unusual choice for a writer who's primary relationship was with another woman and who was aware of feminist and lesbian concerns and debates. Though Renault had an ambivalent relationship to the cultural discourses of feminism, claiming that their sometimes 'defensive stridency is not [...] much more attractive than self-pity',<sup>63</sup> she nonetheless uses a limited range of them in her depiction of Alexander's world, drawing parallels between the

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<sup>62</sup> These include, outing lesbians of the past, following the lives of historical lesbians, and inserting a modern lesbian into a historical context. Laura Doan and Sarah Waters, 'Making up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Intervention of History', in *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*, ed. by David Alderson and Linda Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.12-28.

<sup>63</sup> Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault*, p.175.

male bonded worlds of Alexander and Plato and the female bonded worlds of lesbian/feminist discourse.<sup>64</sup> One particularly clear example of the continuity and compatibility between Renault's cultural position and her appropriative choices surrounds her representation of sex.

Many lesbian discourses had, like Simone De Beauvoir's, offered as an ideal the image of an erotically reciprocal relationship in which 'there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat; in exact reciprocity each at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality'.<sup>65</sup> Renault must work hard to create this kind of relationship between Alexander and Bagoas who is, after all, the king's slave. However, many cues point towards informing ideologies similar to De Beauvoir's. Alexander, though a successful warrior, is considerate as a lover, and Bagoas reflects: 'now that I had shown him his way around the garden of delight[...]he wanted a companion there[...]. He was never clumsy; it was his nature to be a giver, here as elsewhere' (*TPB* p.159). The connotations of giving and companionship, only enhance the image of mutuality which began with the 'happy harmony' of their first sexual encounter (*TPB* p.140). Reciprocity and mutuality inform Renault's re-encoding of Bagoas and Alexander's relationship just as much as they do Alexander's and Hephaistion's, and indeed, as I have shown, Ralph and Laurie's.

I have mentioned Renault's commitment to a moderated eroticism in *The Charioteer* and this is an image that appears again in both *Fire From Heaven* and *The Persian Boy*. Many critics are, like Kopelson, puzzled by the apparently sexless nature of the sex Renault depicts. Julian Hartt has described Bagoas' love for Alexander as 'profoundly feminine',<sup>66</sup> and, although it is perhaps Alexander himself who is the more stereotypically 'feminine,' their love affair is certainly informed by what people consider to be a feminine rather than masculine style of erotics. The stereotypical notion of masculine erotics is encapsulated by pornography where 'sex is sheer desire and physical

<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that Renault did not like the term 'lesbian' and did not think of herself as such. She disliked the idea of categorising people by their sexuality assuming that all such people would share concerns and ideals despite, often huge, individual differences. Zilboorg, *The Masks of Mary Renault*.

<sup>65</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p.405.

<sup>66</sup> Hartt, 'Two Historical Novels', p.453.

gratification'.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, Andrew Russ defines women's 'erotica' as having 'an emphasis on [...]tenderness,[...]sentiment, sensuality and passion[...]with higher and more complex holistic intentions than the singular and mundane one of arousal'.<sup>68</sup> It is certainly clear which one of these descriptions comes closest to describing the erotic elements of Renault's Alexander novels, in which Hephaestion remarks that Alexander 'simply did not think [sex] very important. One might have supposed that the true act of love was to lie together and talk' (*FFH* p.258). All of Alexander's sexual encounters with men recall De Beauvoir's suggestion that 'between women, love is contemplative',<sup>69</sup> for example Alexander is depicted as 'warm, not hot; gentle, in giving and taking', furthermore 'his pace was slow, he liked the pauses of tenderness' (*TBP* p.250). For each of Renault's male heroes the actual sexual act is transcended by the affiliative bond it engenders. This is why the eroticism is moderated, because ultimately under Renault's ideologies it is to be transcended by bonds of friendship and intimacy. For Alexander, love and loyalty are of more value than sexual expression; Bagoas finds sex a 'pleasure but not a need', passionately desiring Alexander's love making for its 'warmth and sweetness' (*TPB* p.156). Even Hephaestion, the most directly sexual of Renault's heroes, is happy to let mental union take precedence over physical gratification, delighting in the fact that 'out of all the world he had been chosen to be everything' to Alexander (*FFH* p.219). Renault suggests that partnerships based in friendship and intimacy are 'ordained' by the partners' 'destinies before their births' (*FFH* p.216), and here I return to Plato and Aristophanes' lovers: two men who share a single soul. Highly compatible with erotic ideologies in which sex is moderated and ultimately transcended by other forms of joining, the 'intense yearning' that each of Aristophanes' lovers feels for the other 'does not appear to be the desire of intercourse' but that of 'becoming one instead of two' (*Symposium* p.17 and p.18). Renault may well have found that image salient, because of her exposure to ideologies such as those expressed in a letter to *The Ladder*, which was probably read by Renault, and which attempts to explain 'that juxtaposition of

<sup>67</sup> Catherine Salmon and Don Symons, 'Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology', *Journal of Sex Research*, 41 (2004), 94-100 (p.96).

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Russ, *No respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.185.

<sup>69</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p.406.

love and friendship,<sup>70</sup> which it claimed only lesbians could share. In this way ideologies shared amongst at least a proportion of women inform Renault's appropriation and re-encoding of male sources.

It is possible that the linking of love and friendship within an erotic context is an idea more commonly accepted by women than men. Such a possibility is suggested by Sedgwick who, in discussing a possible continuum between the social and erotic, claims its visibility is 'radically disrupted' for men, but readily apparent to women.<sup>71</sup> Joanna Russ also suggests this possibility, claiming that 'the splitting of erotic feeling into 'sexual' and 'emotional' is a product of male training not female'.<sup>72</sup> It is certainly true that for Renault, as well as De Beauvoir, and the anonymous contributor to *the Ladder*, friendship and eroticism are compatible, whereas for the male critic Kevin Kopelson they are not. For Renault the fact that sex is transcended by other affiliative bonds does not make her erotic word less erotic, where as for Kopelson the fact that sex is often secondary is incompatible with the fact that Renault's fictional characters desire one another. Is this an example then of the 'specifically feminine psychology'<sup>73</sup> that Felski warns us against insisting upon? It certainly seems to be a paradigm that underlies Renault's appropriations and one which is not shared by many male critics and historians; it may not be unique to women but it does seem to be a feature of their interpretive communities. When Heilbrun writes regretfully of Renault's failure to create strong female characters and describes her historical fiction as motivated by a desire to escape the necessity of creating these female characters,<sup>74</sup> she neglects to see how strongly Renault's novels are informed by female concerns. Renault may not be writing directly about women and/or lesbians but, as I have already suggested, her appropriative strategies are continually inflected with feminine, though not always feminist, concerns.

<sup>70</sup> Cene Damon, *The Ladder*, December 1964, p.26.

<sup>71</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.2. See also, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.207.

<sup>72</sup> Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.169.

<sup>73</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.19.

<sup>74</sup> Heilbrun, 'Axiothea's Grief'.



I do not, however, consider the appropriative strategies I have outlined in Renault's novels to be a result of a simple equation between a writer's life and her text; instead I suggest that they may well reflect wider issues that sociologists, biologists and psychologists claim are more common to women than men. Research has suggested that women, far more than men, are inclined to retell stories in terms of 'interpersonal motives, allegiances, and conflicts'.<sup>75</sup> This is particularly clear in the 'he too is Alexander' appropriations, but it is also suggested by Renault's appropriation of Platonic imagery, not as part of a broad rhetorical argument, but as illustrative of the interpersonal interactions between individual men. Geary's research into sex differences has suggested that women more than men value the emotional, rather than physical aspects of intimate relationships. It is certainly true that many of Renault's appropriative strategies emphasise the emotional aspects of eroticism: *The Charioteer's* re-encoding of pederasty into mutuality is based upon emotional honesty and reciprocity, *Fire From Heaven's* appropriation of Aristophanes' speech is co-opted for the emotionally close relationship between Alexander and Hephaistion, and *The Persian Boy* uses Alcibiades' seduction of Socrates to inform Bagoas' intensely emotional love for his master. Catherine Salmon and Don Symons have suggested that women are interested in intimate social bonds that are 'plausibly more durable and secure than sexual or romantic ones'.<sup>76</sup> In line with this, Renault's re-encoding of both of Alexander's erotic relationships depicts them as lasting until death and represents both as founded upon bonds that incorporate but transcend the physical. Ralph and Laurie's relationship has at least the chance of permanence because it is founded upon an emotional mutuality and social closeness that surpass the romantic 'day dreams' (TC p.345) encapsulated by images of sexual purity.

The appropriative strategies which link *Fire From Heaven*, *The Persian Boy* and *The Charioteer* all work to resituate appropriated images as being indicative of reciprocity, of love and friendship and intimacy. These

<sup>75</sup> David Bleich, 'Gender Interests in Reading and Language', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). pp. 234- 266 (p.261).

<sup>76</sup> Salmon and Symons, 'Slash Fiction', p.99.

appropriative strategies made visible in the gaps between Renault's interpretations, as highlighted in her novels, and those offered by other interpreters have helped us to elucidate the distinctive patterns of Renault's own interpretive strategies, and this has led us to interpretive communities which share Renault's ideals and ideologies. Although in Renault's case the ideal combining love, friendship and intimacy is woven into erotic novels, the evidence of a wider interpretive community sharing similar ideals suggests that this combination might also be seen in texts across a spectrum of sexual specificity and eroticism. Given the centrality of mental and emotional, as opposed to physical, intimacy it may be that other authors would be interested in using appropriation to explore such intimacy, outside of a directly erotic context. These writers would produce texts in which the ambiguous nature of their source material was left unresolved, but in which love friendship and intimacy still characterised appropriative choices. The following chapter will consider the work of Pat Barker, a writer whose sexually ambiguous historical fictions show many similarities to Renault's sexual ones, thus illustrating my claim that both sexual and ambiguous texts should be considered as a part of a wider genre characterised by shared ideologies.



**Chapter Two**  
**Pat Barker's *Regeneration***  
**Privatising Homosocial Intimacy.**

Pat Barker was born in 1943 in Thornaby-on-Tees, she was educated at the London School of Economics and her novels reflect her lifelong interest in history and politics. In 1991 she published *Regeneration*, the first of her trilogy of historical novels about World War One which is completed by *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995). Whilst all three of these novels reflect Barker's interest in intimacy between men, a theme which is woven throughout her historical/political plots, it is the ambiguous *Regeneration* which will form the central core of my investigation here.<sup>1</sup> Given that the most recent of Renault's novels which I discussed in the previous chapter, *The Persian Boy*, was published in 1972, twenty years before Barker's *Regeneration*, the ideological commitments they share are a striking contrast to the cultural gap they span. Although Barker's trilogy is set between 1917 and 1918, and Renault's in approximately 300 BC, during the lifetime of Alexander the Great, both texts appropriate history and use recontextualization to showcase intimacy. The similarities of these texts bridge what is perhaps the most striking difference between Renault's novels and Barker's *Regeneration*: whereas Renault's men are engaged in sexual relations with each other, Barker's interact only at a social level. Barker has, like Renault, chosen to fictionalise interpersonal interactions that did in fact take place and although Barker weaves imagined characters into her historical cast, she shows a particular interest in fleshing out and re-encoding these historical encounters. Unlike Renault's novels, Barker's do not make particular use of any single source, rather they present a collage derived from many disparate historical sources. In terms of intimacy the most central relationship in *Regeneration* is the one between the psychologist William Rivers and the poet Siegfried Sassoon, however there are several other peripheral relationships which are also re-encoded as intimate, for instance those between Rivers and Burns and Sassoon and Owen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Regeneration* has been chosen because it focuses particularly closely on ambiguous and intimate relationships between men.

The ambiguity of *Regeneration* contrasts with the sexual frankness of the second and third novels of the trilogy in which, several scenes describe sexual interactions between men. The central intimate relationship, between Rivers and Sassoon, however remains ambiguous throughout the trilogy and in the later novels is strikingly juxtaposed against sexual encounters which lack any kind of intimacy. By contrast to the reciprocity which characterised intimate sexual relationships in Renault's novels and which characterises Rivers and Sassoon's relationship in Barker's, sexual encounters between Barker's heroes are based upon perceived inequalities for Manning 'cannot - simply cannot - let go sexually with a social equal'<sup>2</sup> and Prior obliges him by making himself look lower-class. By contrast to the mental unity which characterises ambiguous relationships between men in Barker's novels, sexual encounters involve 'lust, resentment,[and ...] envy'.<sup>3</sup> and fail to induce, even temporary, intimacy. In what is the final sexual encounter between Prior and Manning 'great distances opened up', and the 'two inches of sheet' that separate them become, '*miles miles*'.<sup>4</sup> These sexual encounters have more in common with Renault's depiction of the indiscriminate eroticism of subcultural groups than to Renault's depiction of erotic intimacy between men. Rather, Renault's erotic ideal finds its reflection in Barker's ambiguous relationships, which share with Renault's sexual ones a sense of moderated eroticism, reciprocity and mental unity. By contrast to the sexual relationship between Prior and Manning, the ambiguous one between Rivers and Sassoon is characterised by its intimacy: 'I don't know what I'd do without you' says Sassoon to Rivers.<sup>5</sup> In Barker's novels sex is displaced as the central defining principle of human interaction, because as Rivers discovers, 'sexual freedom' is temporary and 'the healing' he requires can only be found through the social relationships he forges amongst his patients.<sup>6</sup>

Although *Regeneration* mentions Sassoon's historically established attraction to men, the intimate relationship that Barker draws between Rivers and Sassoon is characterised by its ambiguity. Barker's choice to create this state of

<sup>2</sup>Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door* (1993, repr. London: Penguin, 1994), p.11.

<sup>3</sup>Barker, *The Eye in the Door*, p.13.

<sup>4</sup>Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road* (1995, repr. London: Penguin, 1996), p.110.

<sup>5</sup>Barker, *The Eye in the Door*, p.236.

<sup>6</sup>Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (1991, repr. London: Penguin, 1992), p.204. All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text.

ambiguity is particularly interesting given that her own personal interpretation of Rivers' and Sassoon's relationship is quite specific about the sexual motivations that underpinned it, as she tells Donna Perry in an interview:

I think, you see, that Rivers is homosexual too. I think that he is in love with Sassoon. One of the things that can't be said in fact is the depth of the feeling he obviously has for Sassoon. Whether he even says it to himself I don't know.<sup>7</sup>

There are many reasons why Barker may have chosen to re-encode this relationship as ambiguous despite her personal decoding of it, including the fact that Rivers' sexuality is historically undefined, and that both he, and Sassoon, have living relatives. If *Regeneration* had primarily been the story of the sexual attraction between Rivers and Sassoon it would have had a different market, a different readership and no doubt inspired very different reviews. Consider for example what happened when an explicitly 'gay novel' won the 2004 Booker prize (the same prize that Barker's *The Ghost Road* won in 1995) and sparked a debate over whether it was 'gay writing or good writing' and whether or not a novel could be 'both'.<sup>8</sup> Monique Witting warns that in its narrow appeal any overtly homoerotic text 'loses its polysemy' and, speaking only of 'homosexuality', 'becomes univocal',<sup>9</sup> thus failing to evoke the wider aspects associated with love, friendship and intimacy. Possibly Barker's decision to create an ambiguous text indicated her desire to explore intimacy without the explanatory paradigm of sexuality, a paradigm which she may have found limited in its intimate potential. Although the ambiguous text characteristically combines erotic and social markers, its very ambiguity prevents its social cues being directly attributed to sexual motivation. By contrast where the sexual is directly evoked, intimacy is likely to be attributed and reduced to the 'univocal' explanatory paradigm it offers. Perhaps this is what Barker has in mind when she claims that 'there are more possibilities in ambiguity than specificity',<sup>10</sup> for there certainly are more possibilities for intimacy in the ambiguous, rather than sexual, relationships that she depicts. For writers who wish to explore the range of

<sup>7</sup> Donna Perry, *Backtalk: Women Writers Speak Out, Interviews with Donna Perry* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p.56.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Richardson, 'Glad to be a Gay Writer', *Guardian*, 25 October 2004, available on line <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1335174,00.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> Monique Witting, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', *Feminist Issues*, 3 (1983), 63-69 (p.65).

<sup>10</sup> Pat Barker, from a talk given at Chester College of Higher Education, 24 October 2002.

possibilities for intimacy between men the ambiguous text, with its characteristic 'polysemy', provides an ideal medium.

### Ambiguous Backdrops

Like Renault's sexual fictions, Barker's ambiguous *Regeneration* chooses to appropriate backgrounds that are both homosocial and ambiguous. 1917, the penultimate year of the First World War, offers numerous such images to the appropriative reader. If disagreement about cultural attitudes towards sexual interaction between men in a period or text is a sign of its ambiguity, then the war years, 1914-18, are no exception. Some historians characterize these years as a time of repression when, as Gregory Woods suggests, it was 'not the time to be daring'<sup>11</sup> because, as Samuel Hynes points out, it was 'a war against homosexuals'<sup>12</sup> as much as one against Germany. In contrast, other historians highlight how the homosocial atmosphere of the war could be 'regarded as legitimating such displays' as hugging and even kissing between men.<sup>13</sup> Several individual testimonies also highlight this homosocial and ambiguous aspect; Rogerson for instance, recalls with fondness the atmosphere which valued 'love passing the love for women of one pal for his half section'.<sup>14</sup> Clearly the First World War, like the Second which Renault dramatised in *The Charioteer*, allowed for certain freedoms within an atmosphere that was also hostile towards any overt expression of sexual desire between men. Barker is certainly aware of this dichotomous combination, for she has Rivers point it out towards the end of *Regeneration*:

[...]in war you've got this *enormous* emphasis on love between men - companionship - and everybody approves. But at the same time there's always this little niggle of anxiety. Is it the right *kind* of love? Well one of the ways you make sure it's the right

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.183.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1990), p.229.

<sup>13</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), p.126.

<sup>14</sup> Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p.55. This quote interestingly conjoins biblical and platonic references to masculine love.



kind is to make it crystal clear what the penalties for the other kind are. (p.204)

This was an era which combined the latitudes concurrent upon what Rivers calls the 'enormous emphasis on love' with a suspicion characterised by the 'little niggle of anxiety' which tends to accompany intimate but ambiguous relationships. Thus Barker chooses to appropriate an era of history which offers a wide range of images of homosocial intimacy between men and her specific appropriative choices utilize that intimacy, privatizing the homosocial experience in the depiction of intense relationships between closely bonded individuals. This is a re-encoding strategy reminiscent of Renault's appropriation of Arian's description of social intimacy between Alexander and Hepatisation for the private and intimate sexual relationship she depicts between them.

It is already clear that intimate cues will have differing implications in differing contexts and Barker's appropriative strategies exploit this flexibility as the intimate cues of WW1 trench literature are imported into the new environment of Craiglockhart war hospital. Barker's re-encoding brings together the homosocial ambiguity of the trenches and the homosocial environment of Craiglockhart, but in the text of *Regeneration* the imported cues reflect not the desperate circumstances of the trenches, nor the professional environment of the hospital, but the range of interpersonal intimacies possible between individual men. Intimate cues were readily available in trench literature which Santanu Das characterises as creating an intense, intimate and tactile world in which 'pity, thrill, affection and eroticism are fused and confused'.<sup>15</sup> This is clearly a description of an ambiguous source, however lacking the concept of ambiguity, Das struggles to articulate that 'fine point where homosociability and homoeroticism [...] intersect at the level of [...] hermeneutic interpretation'.<sup>16</sup> Within the trench literature that Das discusses intimate cues, that might otherwise read as homoerotic, are legitimated by the extreme dangers of the front line. Within this legitimating context a substantial amount of war poetry re-encodes trench experience as one infused with the physical awareness of one man for

<sup>15</sup> Santanu Das, "'Kiss me Hardy': Intimacy, Gender and Gesture in World War I Trench Literature", *Modernism/Modernity*, 9 (2002), 51-74 (p.52)

<sup>16</sup> Das, 'Kiss me Hardy', p.54.

another. 'Carrion' by Harold Monro is just one such example which begins with the male narrator describing the body of a young man.<sup>17</sup> 'The lovely curve of your strong leg' is both a physical and intimate image and yet the homoeroticism it may appear to suggest is contained by the harsh context in which the beautiful young man is reduced to 'carrion'.<sup>18</sup> Thus the poem's ambiguous cues are mitigated by a context in which interpersonal intimacy is impossible since the admired other is already dead. In the less brutal context of Barker's Craiglockhart, however, the same kind of physical awareness is offered in very different circumstances, for instance when Owen, waiting for Sassoon to sign his book of poetry, 'looked down at the back of Sassoon's neck, where a thin line of Khaki was just visible beneath the purple silk of his dressing gown' (p.81). In this context, the two men, both very much alive, are alone in Sassoon's room. The surrounding cues do not mitigate the interpersonal intimacy suggested, but serve to enhance it by mentioning that Owen is aware of Sassoon's 'good looks' (p.81). In this context the ambiguous intimate cues imported from trench literature suggest a privatised interpersonal interaction between Owen and Sassoon, rather than the distant and idealised admiration of youth. As Barker moves the scene of intimacy away from the front line, ambiguous cues are being co-opted to become representative of interpersonal intimacies. While Barker's re-encoding retains the ambiguity of the original cues, the characteristic move towards interpersonal intimacy betrays Barker's interest in exploring intimate relationships between specific individuals either appropriated, as here, or imagined. Both Barker and Renault are involved in a project of selective appropriation which offers what David Cowart suggests is, 'not the past, but a version of the past':<sup>19</sup> a version in which the past whether re-encoded as sexual, as in Renault's texts, or ambiguous, as in Barker's, is thoroughly imbued with intimacy.

### **Barker and Renault, Across the Sexual Divide**

<sup>17</sup> Other, less extreme examples can be found in the work of Sassoon himself, however I have chosen to illustrate this point with Monro because his example is particularly clear.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Monro, 'Carrion', in *Never Such Innocence: A New Anthology of Great War Verse*, ed. by Martin Stephen (London: J.M. Dent, 1991), p.152.

<sup>19</sup> David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p.17.

The appropriative strategies already discussed within Mary Renault's sexual texts demonstrate three central ideological concerns; moderated eroticism, reciprocity and mental unity. All three of these structures were used by Renault to facilitate her representation of love, friendship and intimacy. Barker's ambiguous texts betray similar ideological concerns which are showcased by the appropriative strategies that she uses. The ambiguous text, by its very nature, displays an interest in moderated eroticism; for the eroticism the text may, at one level, suggest, is always, at another level, moderated, prevented from becoming manifest. I have already mentioned how Barker resituates the ambiguous images she appropriates from the front line in such a way as to enhance the interpersonal intimacy that they appear to evoke. The recontextualisations which characterise Barker's re-encoding of trench literature at once enhance the eroticism of the ambiguous cues, by removing the containment of death, and simultaneously moderate their erotic potential by resituating them in a new homosocial space in which intimacy is similarly legitimated by context. Barker also uses many smaller appropriative details to create, via the juxtaposition of textual cues in re-encoding, tensions between eroticism and containment.

It is fairly certain, historically speaking, that a genuine affection existed between Rivers and Sassoon, indeed such a situation is suggested by Sassoon's diaries, one of Barker's most central sources. Upon Rivers' death Sassoon records a letter he received from one of Rivers' friends who wrote: '[Rivers] never tired, you know, of talking to me of you. Your friendship meant for him much more than perhaps you realise. He was shy and reticent in these matters.'<sup>20</sup> Already the source text suggests a relationship with depths concealed by shyness, although it clearly denotes the relationship as 'friendship', offering the appropriative reader very few erotic cues. From this homosocial source, amongst others, Barker is able to appropriate several images of friendship and re-encode them in new ways. Despite the fact that Sassoon begins as Rivers' patient, sent to Craiglockhart as shell-shocked to be 'cured' of his anti-war sentiments, Rivers and he soon become friends. History records that, during Sassoon's time at

<sup>20</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried Sassoon, Diaries 1920-1922*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) p.164.

Craiglockhart, Rivers took him to lunch at his club,<sup>21</sup> an incident that Barker chooses to appropriate for intimacy, adding erotic cues whilst maintaining ambiguity. In Barker's novel the two men are isolated at 'a table for two' in a strikingly idyllic setting in which 'a scent of roses[...]drifted in through the open window' (p.116). The scene of intimacy having been set, Barker manipulates it throughout the following interaction. Rivers notices the young waiter watching Sassoon with an 'undisguised hero worship' (p.117) he thinks is 'not surprising' (p.117). As it stands this textual cue may suggest that Rivers himself feels some kind of hero worship towards Sassoon, an intimate connection which appears to move towards eroticism and beyond the friendship denoted by at least one of Barker's sources. And yet the possible eroticism of this suggestion is contained almost immediately by the following words in which Rivers attributes the boy's hero worship to Sassoon's status as a soldier and the boy's longing for his 'turn' to go to war. In just this small example homosocial cues associated with war and the legitimated hero worship it encouraged jostle uneasily with Barker's implication of interpersonal hero worship and images of roses and tables for two which set the scene for interpersonal intimacy. Barker's use of cues stereotypically associated with the trappings of heterosexual romance suggests an eroticism which is concurrently contained by the wider context of the encounter; thus her text demonstrates its engagement with moderated eroticism. Barker has appropriated the details of a friendship with hidden depths and re-encoded them into contexts designed to highlight the moderated eroticism of intimacy.

Barker uses a similar strategy later in her novel when she once again uses images of hero worship, but links them even more explicitly with eroticism. Here Sassoon is talking to Rivers about Owen's apparent attachment:

“He...er...writes distinctly effusive letters. You know...” He hesitated. “I knew about the hero-worship, but I’m beginning to think it was rather more than that.”

Rivers watched the firelight flicker on Sassoon's hair and face. He said, “It happens.” (p.243).

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<sup>21</sup> Pat Barker, from a talk given at Chester College of Higher Education, 24 October 2002.



Although what 'rather more' than hero-worship might actually entail is never specified, Barker has paraphrased this passage as meaning that Owen was 'in love' with Sassoon.<sup>22</sup> Being 'in love' in our culture is an intimate cue that goes beyond simple friendship and one which is generally associated with eroticism. In this context then, Rivers' dry comment 'it happens' may hint, to the modern reader, at the hidden depths of his own feelings, indeed Pat Barker felt that this particular moment showed Rivers 'with everything hanging out'.<sup>23</sup> At this ambiguous point the text is once again inflected with an eroticism suggested by romantic cues, in this case Rivers' perusal of the flickering firelight on Sassoon's face. *Regeneration* recontextualises the appropriated elements of Rivers' hidden depths and Owen's 'hero-worship', bringing them into suggestive alignment and providing concurrent imagery which evokes an intimacy more commonly associated with eroticism. The strategy betrayed by this appropriation is one familiar from Renault's texts in which the social intimacy of friendship, is appropriated and resituated within a context of moderated eroticism. Although Barker's novel is not used, as Renault's is, to insist upon personal ideologies in which eroticism is moderated, its implicit concern remains with close relationships in which an erotic element is evoked but is not made central.

Barker, like Renault, also uses re-encoding to suggest that the close relationships she describes are characterised by reciprocity and mutuality. Sassoon's diaries and semi fictionalised memories provide numerous images of mutual intimacy which make themselves available for such an appropriative intervention. Particularly useful to Barker was Sassoon's characterization of Rivers as his 'father confessor'<sup>24</sup> a man to whom he could confide intimate details. This image of confessor with its implication of shared secrets helps to create the air of intimacy between Rivers and Sassoon. When Sassoon confides in Rivers about his sexuality by telling him that his 'intimate details disqualify' him 'from military service', Barker's Rivers replies smiling, 'I know' (p.70,p.71) demonstrating not only that intimacy is possible between them, but that it already exists in the shape of their mutual knowledge.

<sup>22</sup> Perry, *Backtalk*, p.56.

<sup>23</sup> Perry, *Backtalk*, p.56.

<sup>24</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Sherston's Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), p.31.

The historical details of Rivers' treatment methods also provide images of reciprocity for the appropriative reader. Rivers encouraged his patients to share their feelings and so his directly asking Sassoon 'what do you feel' (p.189) and Sassoon's willing replies are not unexpected. However this imagery only represents one half of the shared intimacy, the most historically accessible part, that in which Rivers acts as Sassoon's confessor. In line with her interest in reciprocity Barker adds to this images in which Rivers is also shown openly expressing his feelings. In a crucial scene Sassoon presents Rivers with a piece of his poetry, but assures him that he needn't 'say something'. (p.189) Barker's novel encodes Rivers' reciprocal admission of feeling as one that goes beyond words for he, 'was not capable of saying anything. He'd taken off his glasses and was dabbing at the skin round his eyes' (p.189). With this kind of image Barker highlights the reciprocity possible within the otherwise hierarchical relationships, of doctor and patient, and father and son. Barker's re-encoding brings together the father figure imagery and the facts of Rivers' confessional treatment and uses them both in a way reminiscent of Renault's re-encoding of pederasty in *The Persian Boy*, where something essentially hierarchical is appropriated and resituated to develop images of reciprocity.

Like Renault's sexual texts, which suggest the need for mental unity across the spectrum of social and erotic bonds, *Regeneration* also works against the hegemonic belief, perhaps more common amongst men, that 'love and friendship' are 'distinct, if not oppositional, categories'.<sup>25</sup> By virtue of its ambiguous structure alone, *Regeneration* offers the modern reader many images which combine the erotic cues associated with love (the flickering firelight, the scent of roses) with the social cues more generally indicative of friendship (the shared meals and philosophical discussions). The paralleling of these images works to present an ideological landscape, similar to Renault's, in which love friendship and intimacy are yoked tightly together. Perhaps it is the clash between Barker's ideologies as expressed in *Regeneration*, and the hegemonic ideologies which run counter to them, which accounts for the occasional

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<sup>25</sup> Kevin Kopelson, *Love's Litany: The Writing of Modern Homoerotics* (California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.109.

startlingly sexual interpretation of the ambiguous cues within her text. Ben Shephard's review of *Regeneration* for example, berates Barker for what he sees as her text's inaccurate insistence that 'Rivers[...] consciously identified himself as homosexual'.<sup>26</sup> Since it is certain that Barker's text never presents Rivers as overtly 'homosexual', whatever her private interpretation, it must be that within Shephard's interpretive community the love and intimacy offered by *Regeneration* is so incompatible with the image of friendship that the two are unable to be interpreted as one. Anna Smol has suggested that 'the indeterminate nature of the homosocial relationship [...] is unfamiliar and disturbing to some readers'<sup>27</sup> and it does seem that when faced with texts which combine social and erotic cues many interpretive strategies work to divorce the two elements. Kopelson's reading of Renault's social/erotic bonds attempts to explain away the sexual and focus on the social, whereas Shephard's reading of Barker's ambiguous text attempts to overturn the social in favour of the sexual. In each strategy one type of cue is enhanced at the expense of the other, and yet, the ideological landscape of the texts themselves insists upon the coexistence of both social and erotic elements.

In the previous chapter I discussed how Renault used the character of Bagoas to guide the reader towards the interpretations which lined up with her own implied ideologies. Barker, perhaps anticipating readers who, like Ben Shephard, would struggle with the text's ambiguous structure also has a character who functions as a intratextual interpreter; this is Ruth, the wife of Rivers' good friend Head. In the second volume of the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door*, Ruth and Head discuss Rivers' friendship with Sassoon and Ruth asks: 'Do you think he's in love with him?' to which Head replies enigmatically, 'He's a patient'. Frustrated, Ruth protests: 'That's not an answer.'<sup>28</sup> Ruth, like Bagoas is a questioner who tries to decode the relationships around her, but in the ambiguous context of *Regeneration* no answers are forthcoming. What Ruth does however is to draw the modern reader's attention to the relationship in question, and encourage them to attempt their own decoding of it. Perhaps Ruth also draws the

<sup>26</sup> Ben Shephard, 'Digging up the Past', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 March 1996, p.13.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Smol, "'Oh...Oh...Frodo!'" Readings of Male Intimacy in *The Lord of the Rings*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50 (2004), 948-979 (p.956).

<sup>28</sup> Barker, *The Eye in the Door*, p.227.

reader's attention to the juxtaposition of social and erotic cues that the text contains. Indeed, rather as if Barker is playing with the possibilities raised by Ruth's question, the next section begins: 'Siegfried was sitting up in bed, pyjama jacket off, face and chest gleaming with sweat. "Is it hot, Rivers?" he asked.'<sup>29</sup> Denoted meaning remains suggestively open until, over the page, a social explanation is offered for the otherwise physical and erotic cues: Rivers, the good friend and doctor, is sitting by the bedside of the recuperating and agitated Sassoon. However, Ruth's question will probably have drawn the modern reader's attention to the ambiguous connotations of the text, and, as D.A. Miller suggests, connotation 'once received in all its uncertainty [...] instigates a project of confirmation'.<sup>30</sup> Such a project is continually frustrated by the ambiguity of the text, but the modern reader's desire to undertake it draws their attention to ideologies which link friendship and eroticism and highlight the intimate potential of reciprocity. Thus Ruth, like Bagoas guides the reader towards the author's ideological perspective.

### **Ideological Readings of Ambiguity**

Barker's ideologically driven appropriation and re-encoding of Rivers and his ambiguous relationships with Sassoon and other men may be compared to other re-encodings which reveal different ideological frameworks. Arnold Bennett, a close friend of Rivers, wrote an obituary for him in 1922 in which appropriated images are used to construct an elaborate joke about Rivers' interest, or lack thereof, in women. Bennett writes: 'I thought at first that he had almost no interest in women' and recounts how he staged a dance to see if he could not tempt the reluctant Rivers.<sup>31</sup> Rivers however, was only interested in the women at the dance on an intellectual level, and despite the romance of the 'heavenly evening' he regarded the whole thing as a curious 'social phenomenon'.<sup>32</sup> Bennett's re-encoding of Rivers' life suggests that Rivers was not sexually interested in women, but does not offer a sexual preference for men

<sup>29</sup> Barker, *The Eye in the Door*, p.227.

<sup>30</sup> D.A. Miller, 'Anal Rope,' in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.119-141 (p.125).

<sup>31</sup> Arnold Bennett, 'WHR Rivers: Some Recollections', *New Statesman*, 17 June 1922, p.291.

<sup>32</sup> Bennett, 'WHR Rivers', p.291.



as an explanation. In this re-encoding neither social nor erotic cues are particularly central. This suggests an ideological framework in which lack of interest in heterosexual interaction is in no way indicative of other intimate possibilities. Slobodin's biography of 1978, *WHR Rivers: Pioneer Anthropologist, Psychiatrist of The Ghost Road*, like Bennett's obituary, re-encodes Rivers as 'a bachelor' who was 'not particularly concerned with or for women as such'.<sup>33</sup> However in this context Rivers' indifference to women is indirectly contrasted to Rivers' intense relationships with men for Rivers' is also re-encoded as a man who had 'power over men, especially young men' and whose friendship with Sassoon made him a 'far happier man'.<sup>34</sup> In this context, the lack of heterosexual interest is yoked to an emotional investment in homosocial relationships. In this re-encoding homosocial cues are brought to the fore but are paralleled by very few erotic ones. This suggests that Slobodin's ideological perspective is one in which although interpersonal connections are central they are strictly social, their ambiguous or erotic elements ignored. In Elaine Showalter's essay, 'Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties' written in 1987, the narrative also mentions Rivers' 'unmarried' status and connects it to the fact that 'he derived his greatest emotional satisfaction from his role as the teacher, mentor and therapist of troubled young men'.<sup>35</sup> However to these homosocial cues Showalter adds that Sassoon's memoirs 'hint at the homoerotic element' in Sassoon's and Rivers' relationship.<sup>36</sup> This is a definitive statement; it is not the suggestion of 'a' homoerotic element, but an unveiling of 'the' homoerotic element. Showalter's terms suggest that her ideological perspective is one in which sexual motivation is assumed to be behind Sassoon's ambiguous references to Rivers.<sup>37</sup> Her re-encoding highlights social cues and offers erotic cues to explain them, very little ambiguity remains. Showalter's re-encoding appropriates ambiguity for eroticism and betrays an

<sup>33</sup> Richard Slobodin, *WHR Rivers: Pioneer Anthropologist, Psychiatrist of the Ghost Road* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1997), p.48, p.39.

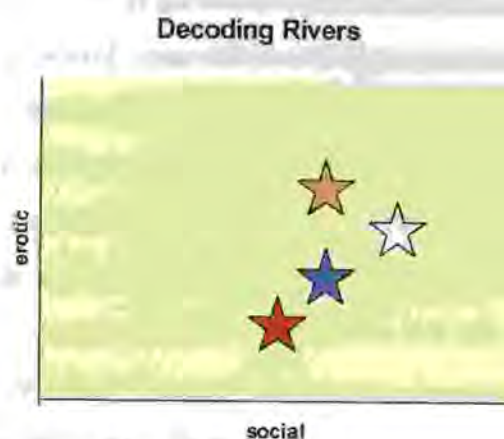
<sup>34</sup> Slobodin, *WHR Rivers*, p.58.

<sup>35</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties', in *Behind The Lines: Gender and The Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp.61-69 (p.68).

<sup>36</sup> Showalter, 'Rivers and Sassoon', p.68.

<sup>37</sup> Although Sassoon's diaries do mention his homosexuality, they do not specify whether or not he was sexually attracted to Rivers. Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried Sassoon, Diaries 1920-1922*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).

ideological perspective not dissimilar to Ben Shephard's in which intimacy almost inevitability signals eroticism. In my opinion the appropriation and re-encoding showcased by *Regeneration* lies in between Slobodin's and Showalter's: its social and erotic cues suggest an ideological perspective in which intimate interpersonal relationships are of central importance, but erotic cues are contained, this perspective does not insist upon sexual motivation being the driving force of intimate interactions. The differing perspectives of these re-encodings of Rivers and his relationships can be compared on the chart. The Red star represents Bennett's obituary, The blue star Slobodin's biography, the orange star Showalter's essay and finally the white star shows where *Regeneration* might be situated for comparison.



Each re-encoding differs in its use of social and erotic cues, however what is of interest is that Barker's appropriative choices, although ambiguous, situate the relationship between Rivers and Sassoon high on both the social and erotic axes, a strategy which, if you turn back to p.55 and p.64, can be compared to Renault's. Although Renault's re-encoding of ambiguity is sexual and Barker's is ambiguous, both appropriative strategies share a perspective which places them in a comparatively similar area. Thus, despite overt differences, the same ideologies, ones which work to centralise intimacy, can be foregrounded by both ambiguous and sexual texts.

Since both Barker and Renault are demonstrably drawn towards re-encoding ambiguous sources in similar ways, it seems natural to wonder if there is any connection between the interpretive communities that they were

influenced by. Unsurprisingly both writers have an ambivalent but clear connection to feminism; Renault contributed to lesbian feminist magazines, and Barker has several times mentioned her interest in feminism.<sup>38</sup> Although feminist discourses vary considerably a significant number of them point to the existence of an interpretive community for whom the combination of love, friendship and intimacy forms an ideal. Shelia Jeffreys, a feminist writing, as Barker did, in the early 1990s, espouses ideologies in which elements 'commonly understood as [...] "sexual"' should not be separated out from other affiliative bonds.<sup>39</sup> Images of love, friendship and intimacy are often combined within the ambiguous source and for this reason such sources may resonate with the appropriative writer who has an ideological interest in uniting these elements. At this stage it may seem as if the texts I am bringing together here are connected by the feminist perspective of their authors: however, as I move away from mainstream literature in subsequent chapters it will become clear that a constellation of ideologies concerned with the representation of intimacy is shared by a spectrum of women many of whom have no demonstrable investment in feminist discourses. Instead of suggesting that these texts are connected through their authors' involvement with feminist interpretive practices, I would like to suggest the existence of an independent interpretive community for whom intimacy is central to reading and writing practice. This should be envisaged as a hypothetical community of unconnected individuals who, no doubt for disparate reasons, share a distinctive interpretive perspective.

### Appropriation and Intimacy

It should now be clear that the genre of which *Regeneration*, *Fire from Heaven*, *The Persian Boy* and *The Charioteer* are a part is one which is characterized by the distinctive ways in which it centralises intimacy. Anne Whitehead claims that Barker's 'primary interest appears to be in the power of fictional narrative to reshape the historical event'.<sup>40</sup> From this assumption

<sup>38</sup> Sharon Monteith, *Pat Barker* (Devon: Northcote House, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Shelia Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), p.202.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Whitehead 'Open to Suggestion: Hypnosis and History in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 44 (1998), 674-694 (p.690).



Whitehead investigates how the plot of *Regeneration* reflects these concerns. However, of more interest to me here is how the appropriation the text offers puts these interests of Barker's into practice. Barker's use of fictional narrative in the process of re-encoding frequently gives a new shape to the appropriated historical event. Throughout *Regeneration* Barker's reshaping or re-encoding works to the same end; appropriated elements are re-encoded in Barker's narrative to serve the central interest in interpersonal intimacy.

Close scrutiny and eye contact are two of many images which can become indicative of a wide spectrum of interpersonal interactions depending upon their context. Michael Hatt has written extensively on the question of the male gaze and the connotations of it being directed at other men in art and literature. He lists several ways in which the male-to-male gaze may be encoded in ways which do not overtly signal eroticism: two of these are apposite to Barker's re-encoding of Rivers. Firstly, Hatt suggests that 'within a specific discourse' such as medicine or sport the male-to-male gaze is legitimated. Secondly he claims that any hierarchical structure also legitimates the gaze because, 'looking is a legitimate function of power'.<sup>41</sup> Rivers' historical role as psychologist legitimates his gaze at both levels: it gives him power and provides the discourse of medicine. *Regeneration* depicts the male-to-male gaze in these homosocial contexts many times: for instance Rivers, during his first meeting with Sassoon noted 'no twitches, jerks, blinks, no repeated ducking to avoid a long exploded shell. His hands doing complicated things with cup, saucer, plate, sandwiches, cake, sugar tongs and spoon, remained perfectly steady.' (p.10) In this context Barker rather explicitly legitimates River's gaze by making it a function of his medical role, 'one of the nice things about serving afternoon tea', she has Rivers reflect, 'was that it made so many neurological tests redundant' (p.10). However, at other times these legitimating strategies are not called upon, and hence the images of eye contact are contextualised in different ways, ways which are rather more suggestive of interpersonal intimacy.

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Hatt, 'The Male Body in Another Frame', *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts: The Body Issue*, (1993), 8-21 (p.13).



Richard Dyer playfully outlines the eye contact codes that are used in modern films to encourage the viewer to understand that the hero and heroine are intimately interested in one another:

We have a close up of him looking off camera, followed by one of her looking downwards[...]it is very definitely established that he looks at her and she is looked at[...].<sup>42</sup>

He is looking at her but she doesn't know that he is.<sup>43</sup>

[...]Then she may look briefly up and off camera, and we may go back briefly to the boy still looking – but it is only briefly.<sup>44</sup>

These codes are startlingly reproduced by Barker when Rivers and Sassoon first meet. First we see Rivers looking 'off camera' out of his window: 'He reached the window in time to see a taxi draw up, [...]' (p.9). Then we see who it is he sees, '[...]a man, who from his uniform could only be Sassoon' (p.9). Sassoon looks briefly up: 'Sassoon stood for a moment looking up at the building.' (p.9) We know that Rivers looks at him, but that Sassoon doesn't know it, for Rivers has 'witnessed [his] small, private victory over fear' (p.9). This intimate re-encoding continues in the following chapter that sees Rivers and Sassoon actually meet. At first Sassoon averts his eyes: 'So far he hadn't looked at Rivers. He sat with his head slightly averted.' (p.10) Whilst Rivers watches him, Sassoon risks a brief look: 'He glanced at Rivers,' (p.11) but quickly looks away again, 'down at his hands' (p.12). Though Dyer describes a strictly gendered system of looking which would position Rivers as hero and Sassoon as heroine, eye contact cues can work just as clearly in same sex situations. Rictor Norton, for example describes a similar exchange of looks as being cues through which he understands that a potential pick up is attracted to him: 'the eyes, they're a dead give away[...]if someone looks at you with a lingering look, and looks away, and then looks at you again,' it is a sure sign of sexual attraction.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.103.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.119.

<sup>44</sup> Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, p.103.

<sup>45</sup> Rictor Norton, *The Myth of The Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997), p.21.

Both legitimated and intimately suggestive re-encodings of eye contact coexist within *Regeneration* which is saturated with images of the male gaze. Rivers watches 'Sassoon's continued poring over the menu with affection as well as amusement,' (p.116) and Sassoon watches Rivers who 'looked up and found Sassoon's gaze upon him' (p.204). Barker strategically appropriates images from the legitimated historical source of Rivers the psychologist and uses them in her re-encoding of Rivers the individual, moving the connotive structure from professionalism towards intimacy. It is interesting to note how the ambiguous structure of *Regeneration* highlights the intimacy it re-encodes, for in this context the male gaze is not reduced to a sign of sexual attraction, as it is in the sexual circumstances of the Hollywood romance or the casual pick-up, but is co-opted for an intimacy, which combines love and friendship but cannot be explained by the social or the sexual alone.

Barker is also able to use the historical facts of Rivers' treatment methods to infuse her character's interactions with intimacy. As *Regeneration* highlights, Rivers' treatment involved encouraging men to 'accept their emotions', to 'let themselves *feel*' 'horror', 'fear' and 'tenderness' and to recognise that 'tears were an acceptable and helpful part of the process of grieving' (p.48). To achieve this healing Rivers encouraged his patients to verbalise their emotional experiences. The historical reality of Rivers' treatment now coincides with modern ideologies concerning female friendship, for it has been said that "face-to-face" characterises women's friendship patterns, whilst "side-by-side" describes men's'.<sup>46</sup> Hegemonic ideologies suggest that between men 'intimacy develops through shared pursuits and shared risks' whilst between women it involves 'shared disclosures'<sup>47</sup> and yet it is this latter image which colours the face-to-face interaction typical of Rivers and Sassoon in *Regeneration*. When Rivers leads Sassoon to 'intimate territory' (p.53) in their conversation, Sassoon does not back away but rather discloses his interest in Carpenter's book *The Intermediate Sex*. Rivers does not judge him, but shows understanding and interest, rewarding the intimate disclosure with reassurance and trust. It is possible that once again a

<sup>46</sup> *Men's Friendships*, ed. by Peter M. Nardi (London: Sage, 1992), p.5.

<sup>47</sup> Drury Sherrod, 'The Bonds of Men: Problems and Possibilities in Close Male Relationships', in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. by Harry Brod (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp.213-239 (p.236).

cultural resonance is drawing female appropriative writers towards specific sources. If Barker is part of an interpretive community for whom the 'face-to-face' qualities of interpersonal relationships are important, then it is no surprise that she is drawn to the possibilities for disclosure offered by Rivers and his methods. That she subsequently re-encodes those appropriated images as indicative of interpersonal intimacy, can also be attributed to the fact that within her interpretive community intimacy is the intentional by product of emotional disclosure. In line with the ideologies surrounding female friendship, Barker's Rivers elicits intimacy by asking Sassoon, 'What do you feel?' (p.189) and appears to take a certain pride in the resulting disclosures when he reminds Sassoon that, 'you talk to *me*' (p.36). Barker is appropriating historically accurate facts about Rivers' treatment methods and re-encoding them to become representative of the kind of privatised interpersonal face-to-face intimacy that is familiar to her from contemporary ideologies surrounding female friendship.

One of the most effective ways in which Barker's appropriation contextualises historically probable events as indicative of intimacy occurs in what I am going to term scenes of 'hurt/comfort'. Hurt/comfort is a description I have borrowed from the terminology of media fan fiction. It is used to describe a scene or story in which one of the two heroes is suffering, either physically, mentally or both, and the other provides, often physical, comfort.<sup>48</sup> Although the term hurt/comfort is relatively recent and specific to fan fiction, the structure it describes has a long history and can be found in literature dating back to the ancient Greek friendship stories in which as Halperin claims 'death is the climax of the friendship. The occasion of the most extreme expressions of tenderness on the part of the two friends.'<sup>49</sup> The value of hurt/comfort elements in the ambiguous text is clearly that they create a situation which justifies expressions of tenderness between men that might, in other circumstances, seem homoerotic in nature. Images suggestive of hurt/comfort are readily available to the

<sup>48</sup> Although Smol, 'Oh...Oh...Frodo!' insists that hurt/comfort originated in modern slash fan fiction communities, in fact the use of the term in fannish circles pre-dates slash fiction. Fan writer Leslie Fish characterised the emergence of slash as 'The End of the Hurt/Comfort Syndrome', postulating, quite wrongly as it turned out, that now people were writing about sexual relationships they would not use hurt/comfort to dramatize intimacy.

<sup>49</sup> David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.79.

appropriative reader of war time sources in which the trench experience served to legitimate 'bodily intimacy in times of physical extremity'.<sup>50</sup> Following a familiar strategy, Barker's appropriation of hurt/comfort re-encodes it into a non combative setting, decreasing the element of physical danger and hence increasing the interpersonal intimacy suggested by the comfort. Barker's most dramatic use of hurt/comfort occurs in a scene between Burns and Rivers. Burns is one of Rivers' patients and another of his intimate male friends. In this particular scene Rivers is staying at Burns' home when, on a stormy night, the still traumatised Burns disappears. Rivers finally finds him in a state of deep shock:

His body felt like a stone. Rivers got hold of him and held him, coaxing, rocking. [...] Burns's remained rigid in his arms [...]. His surrender, when it came, was almost shocking. Suddenly his body had the rag doll floppiness of the newborn. He collapsed against Rivers and started to shake (p.180).

Once again Barker's appropriation privatises the homosocial, her heroes are not in the trenches with many other men but are instead alone in a disused moat. The passage with its images of rigidity, surrender and collapse offers the densest network of erotic cues within *Regeneration*, and yet these cues are being made to serve not the sexual but the intimate. Although it is no doubt the prevalence of this type of image in war novels which leads Sedgwick to conclude that they can look 'quite startlingly "homosexual"',<sup>51</sup> erotic and physical cues such as 'body', 'hold', 'held', 'coaxing', 'rocking', 'in his arms', 'surrender' and 'collapsed against' are here co-opted for the intimacy of comfort rather than sexual suggestion. Compared to its appropriative source in trench literature the 'comfort' is resituated to appear more indicative of interpersonal intimacy whilst the 'hurt' is used to provide the justification it requires. The ambiguity of the source material remains intact throughout the recontextualisation which simply restructures its dynamic of intimacy.

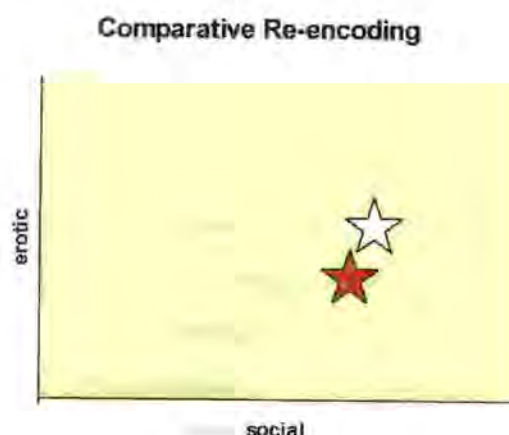
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<sup>50</sup> Das, 'Kiss me Hardy', p.53

<sup>51</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.89.

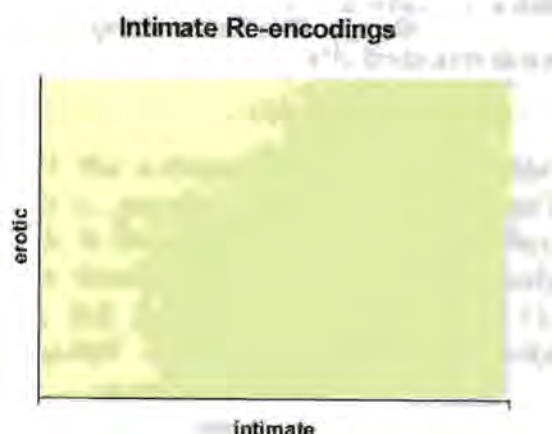


The appropriative resituation made in each of the examples above, from the doctor's scrutiny, to the psychologist's treatment and hurt/comfort, might be represented on the chart as follows. The red star represents the balance of social and erotic cues that might be apprehended in the original homosocial sources. The white star places Barker's appropriation next to that, showing how *Regeneration's* atmosphere of intimacy offers a slightly greater number of erotic cues.

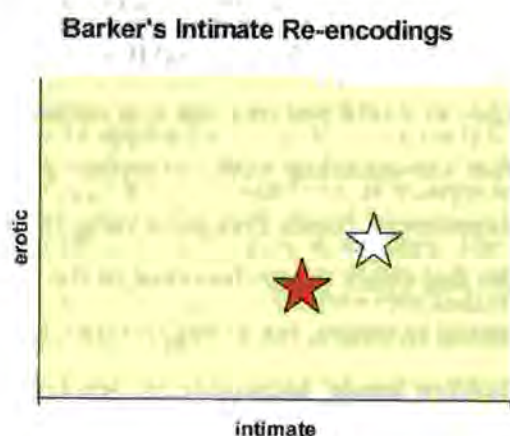


Turn back to page p.55 and you can again see how similar this appropriative resituation is to Mary Renault's. The intimate genre of literature, under discussion here typically re-encodes appropriated elements by moving them towards the upper right hand corner of the chart, but it should now be apparent that they do something more specific than this too. My comparison of *Regeneration* to its sources, offered on the chart above, suggests that Barker's text re-encodes homosocial elements as 'more' social than they are historically. In fact it would be hard to claim that Rivers' and Burns' moat is a more social context than the trenches of world war one; but it is certain that it is a more intimate context. Barker's re-encoding works to replace professional homosocial bonds with personal homosocial bonds thus privatising intimate experience. I would not like to claim that either the professional or the personal is fundamentally more social in nature, but to suggest that, for instance, 'shaking hands' differs from 'holding hands' because of the level of intimacy suggested. The intimate can therefore be considered as a specialised subcategory of social interaction, which, like many social bonds, may or may not be combined with an erotic or sexual element. At this point I believe that in order for my chart to

facilitate further discussion of the characteristic appropriations which are being made by these intimate texts, it is necessary to replace the general, 'social', with the specific, 'intimacy'. This should be seen as an increasingly specialised development of the preceding chart which was used to discuss ambiguity, a version which is more capable of diagrammatically representing the strategic moves made by the texts under discussion here. The refined chart would look like this:



This, more specialised, chart can be used to better represent the re-encoding that Barker is making. The red star here positions her homosocial sources as less indicative of interpersonal intimacy and less erotically inflected and than the subsequent re-encoding of them in *Regeneration*, which is represented here by the white star.



The white star of Barker's appropriation shows how her re-encoding increases the intimacy and eroticism of appropriated details by her use of non combative,

private and at times romantic contexts. It is the increase of erotic cues, that tends to parallel the increase in intimate ones, which is no doubt responsible for the fact that many of the ambiguous texts which form part of this genre have been interpreted as sexual by modern readers.

Ben Shephard, the reviewer who berated Barker for making Rivers 'homosexual', is not the only reader to find themselves aware of the erotic elements in the ambiguous text of *Regeneration*. Martin Loschnigg claims to detect in *Regeneration* an 'overriding concern with [...] homosexuality'<sup>52</sup> and Karin Westman struggles to account for what she terms the 'absent presence' of homosexuality.<sup>53</sup> I believe that these interpretations arise because of the cultural overlap between the images Barker uses to be indicative of intimacy and those which people stereotypically associate with a modern homosexual identity. This means that for the modern reader, intimate cues often offer sexual connotations. Stephanie Madon conducted an extensive investigation into what people believed were traits of homosexual men in 1997, and many of these traits can be found in Barker's intimate re-encoding of Rivers. Madon's research showed that many people think homosexual men are 'good listeners' who are 'understanding', 'open about feelings' and emotionally 'in touch with themselves'.<sup>54</sup> These are all elements which are suggested by Rivers' professional methods and which are appropriated by Barker to facilitate her representation of intimacy. Added to this Barker's re-encoding of Rivers depicts his interpersonal relationships in terms related to the norms of female, rather than male, friendship and as Madon's research highlighted one of the most pervasive beliefs about homosexual men is that they 'violate [...] gender roles'.<sup>55</sup> If this kind of representational overlap can plausibly account for sexualised interpretations of the ambiguous *Regeneration* it may be because, through its text, readers are drawn into an interpretive dialogue with the boundary which imperfectly separates the intimate from the sexual. I

<sup>52</sup> Martin Loschnigg, ' "...The Novelist's Responsibility to the Past": History, Myth and the Narratives of Crisis in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* Trilogy (1991-1995)', *Zeitschrift Fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik a Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture*, 47 (1999), 214-228 (p.223).

<sup>53</sup> Karin E. Westman, *Pat Barker's 'Regeneration': A Readers Guide* (London: Continuum, 2001), p.39.

<sup>54</sup> Stephanie Madon, 'What Do People Believe About Gay Males? A study of Stereotype content and Strength', *Sex Roles*, 37 (1997), 663-658 (p.677).

<sup>55</sup> Madon, 'What Do People Believe About Gay Males?', p.680-681.



believe that the division between intimacy and sexuality, in our current culture, can be considered an example of what Alan Sinfield has termed a 'faultline'.<sup>56</sup> This is something which he characterises as an 'unresolved ideological complication' in culture 'that finds its way willy-nilly into texts'.<sup>57</sup> Sinfield theorises that writers are drawn to sources which involve faultlines and that they will subsequently try to re-work them, attempting to resolve the contradictions and complications that they embody. The appropriative text that the writer then produces will thus re-encode the faultline in varying ways. In the case of the intimate/sexual faultline appropriative readers may be drawn to ambiguous sources because of their very instability in this regard. Their subsequent interpretations may try to separate the intimate and sexual elements, or they may try to weave them together into a coherent whole, a whole which may either be ambiguous, like its source, or erotic and intimate.

### **The Faultline of Intimacy**

When Stuart Miller wanted to write a book about male friendship, he found that such a concept was readily misinterpreted as a covert reference to homoerotic desire. When he told his friends about his book many replied 'Male friendship'? 'You mean you are going to write about homosexuality?'.<sup>58</sup> This confused reaction is probably due to the faultline which imperfectly separates the sexual and the intimate in our culture, meaning that the modern reader may find it hard to distinguish between intimate and sexual cues. Unsure how to interpret these ambiguous cues some interpretive practitioners will always centralise the sexual. Indeed sexuality has become so pervasive in modern western culture that Sedgwick can preface her book about literary interpretation, *Epistemology of the Closet*, with the claim that.

An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it

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<sup>56</sup> Sinfield, *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.4.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics*, p.4.

<sup>58</sup> Stuart Miller, *Men and Friendship* (London: Gateway Books, 1983), p.2.



does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/ heterosexual definition.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Sedgwick betrays an interpretive practice in which all literary and cultural meanings centre around sexual meanings, and the sexual may be used as an explanatory paradigm for a wide spectrum of interaction, including presumably, intimacy and ambiguity.<sup>60</sup> Within Sedgwick's ideologies, sexual identity is the structuring principle of human interaction, however in the worlds created by the appropriative writers discussed here, intimacy is the structuring principle of human interaction from the ambiguous to the sexual. The very coexistence of such opposing ideological positions reflects the 'unresolved [...] complications' that Sinfield suggested were characteristic of a cultural faultline.

The faultline surrounding the sexual and the intimate began to take on its current form during the historical period that Barker's *Regeneration* re-encodes. Indeed Barker's interest in intimacy between men may well have drawn her towards this period in which the sexual and the intimate were frequently, as Das describes it, 'fused and confused'.<sup>61</sup> Since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been a gradual increase in the cultural salience of the sexual which has seen a concurrent narrowing of the cultural spaces for uncontested nonsexual intimacy. Since the term 'homosexual' entered our language in 1868<sup>62</sup> and hence gradually our culture, there have been, as Lynne Segal points out, the tools to make possible the 'imputation' of (homo)sexual interest to intimate bonds between men.<sup>63</sup> Freud's work was also influential in the sexualisation of the intimate; and was particularly so in the years 1919 -1925 when there was a 'flood of Freud-in-translation'.<sup>64</sup> For many people Freudian theories suggested that unconscious sexual motivations lay behind most social and intimate actions.

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<sup>59</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.1.

<sup>60</sup> Whilst Sedgwick's personal ideologies, as explored in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.175, p.254, betray her interest in intimacy between men, her literary interpretations always work to centralise the (homo)sexual elements of ambiguous texts.

<sup>61</sup> Das, 'Kiss me Hardy', p.52.

<sup>62</sup> For details about the origin and use of the word 'homosexual' see, Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Picador, 2003)

<sup>63</sup> Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities: Changing Men* (London: Virago, 1990), p.139.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1990), p.365.

Indeed, so pervasive was the influence of Freud's theories that by 1927 European Marxist critic Volosinov could despair that: 'each aspect of life, each happening and object [...] each thing, as it were, turns its sexual not social, side to the human gaze.'<sup>65</sup> The social, intimate and sexual remain imperfectly separated and this continuing faultline has inspired post modern interpretive practices such as 'Queering' which appear to revel in fluidity and 'take instability' as their subject.<sup>66</sup> For the majority, however, as Jeffrey Weeks points out, the interpretive project remains to 'strive to fix' sexuality 'insisting on a true identity behind the ambiguities of outward appearance'.<sup>67</sup>

The common insistence on labelling ambiguity has meant that many ambiguous texts and histories have become classified as sexual and I have already hinted at the prevalence of this process in my discussions of Shephard's interpretation of *Regeneration*, and of Showalter's of Rivers' life. One further example of the way interpersonal intimacy has become increasingly sexualised is provided by Edward Carpenter's book *Iolaus*. First published in 1902, *Iolaus* was subtitled 'An anthology of friendship'<sup>68</sup> and brings together a selection of writings about intimacy between men. It includes no text which is unambiguously sexual, although it does include several passages from the *Symposium* which refer to lovers and their beloveds. The back of this book claims that it 'surveys romantic friendship between males'<sup>69</sup> and one assumes that the text was ambiguous at the time of its publication. Nonetheless, as our culture has changed during the years since 1902 *Iolaus* has been variously decoded as sexual. Despite its own claim to be about 'friendship', the British library has it catalogued under 'homosexuality' and according to Rictor Norton it is an 'anthology of gay love' crudely termed 'the buggers' bible,'<sup>70</sup> a nickname which implies none of the intimacy so central to the original. These retrospective

<sup>65</sup> V.N. Volosinov, 'Freudianism: a Critical Sketch', trans. by I.R. Titunik, Ed. in Collab. with N.H. Buss, in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Volosinov*, ed. by Pam Morris (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), pp.38-48 (p.47).

<sup>66</sup> Martha M Umphrey, 'The Trouble with Harry Thaw', *Radical History Review*, 62 (1995), 8-23 (p.20).

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p.186-7.

<sup>68</sup> *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship* ed. by Edward Carpenter, (Swan Sonnenschein and Co.: London 1902; New York: Pagen Press, 1982).

<sup>69</sup> *Iolaus* – back cover.

<sup>70</sup> Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, p.17, p.129.

decodings of the text as unambiguously sexual show how difficult it can be to 'put aside twentieth century biases' and 'become sensitive to a pre-Freudian era'.<sup>71</sup>

Both Barker's and Renault's texts showcase ideologies which reject the sexual as the central defining principle of close relationships, replacing it with intimacy. Although the re-encoding practice of both writers is complicit with ideologies that interpret intimacy as erotic, (for both add erotic elements to their appropriation of ambiguous sources) this eroticism is always represented as important only in so far as it retains its intimacy. In the ideal relationships created by Barker and Renault intimate and sexual/erotic cues work side by side and the sexual never becomes divorced from its intimate context, thus intimacy and eroticism are made to unite across the cultural faultline which separates them. Barker's ambiguous text encourages the reader to question any ideological assumption that all intimacy must 'really' be about sexuality, that, as Rictor Norton puts it, the homosocial 'is little more than homosexuality with a fig leaf'.<sup>72</sup> *Regeneration* asks the reader to consider the importance not of sex, but of intimacy. It is intimacy that provides healing for both Rivers and Sassoon, a healing which neither man finds through sexual experience. Is it possible that in this ideological structure the text reflects a 'specifically feminine psychology'?<sup>73</sup> Do women tend towards ideologies which centralise intimacy? It is certainly true that biological research into sex differences has suggested that 'for many women intimacy is required before the development of a sexual relationship' and that women find intimate bonds more binding than sexual ones.<sup>74</sup> Some men may of course share this ideological perspective with women and it is one of these men, Lee Siegel, who fears that the focus on sex in literary criticism and culture may break 'the sympathetic bond between the heart and the flesh'.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Karen V. Hansen, "'Our Eyes Beheld Each Other': Masculinity and Intimate Friendship in Antebellum New England', in *Men's Friendships*, pp.35-57 (p.43).

<sup>72</sup> Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, p.8.

<sup>73</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.19.

<sup>74</sup> David Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), p.131.

<sup>75</sup> Lee Siegel, 'The Gay Science: Queer Theory, Literature, and the Sexualization of Everything', *The New Republic*, 9 November 1998, p.42.

In the current sexually focused culture intimate texts which refuse to idealise sexual interaction divorced from intimacy might actually be more challenging than the graphically sexual in their attempts to re-encode 'hegemonic society and the tales it tells'.<sup>76</sup> Roland Barthes has expressed a view that 'love' might be more culturally problematic than 'sex'; 'love', he writes, 'is obscene precisely in that it puts the sentimental in place of the sexual'.<sup>77</sup> Might the potential of intimacy to destabilise hegemonic ideologies by centralising the 'sentimental' and linking the 'heart and the flesh', be a lure for some female writers within whose interpretive community the intimate is of greater import than the sexual? Within these interpretive communities intimacy is central to the interpretation of sources, the appropriation of images, and the re-encoding that shapes the resultant texts. Intimacy is in fact so central to these interpretive strategies that the texts produced through them may be defined by it. I shall now move on to consider that definition before expanding upon it through the investigation of Susan Hill's ambiguous *Strange Meeting* in which the hero is enculturated into the author's imagined world of intimacy.

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<sup>76</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth - Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p.122.

<sup>77</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p.178.



**Chapter Three**  
**Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting***  
**Hello Hilliard, Welcome to Intimatopia**

It is by now apparent that Renault's sexual texts share, with Barker's ambiguous ones, an abundance of ideologically informed appropriative strategies. Indeed, despite their overt differences, all the texts considered thus far offer characteristic re-encodings which tend towards increasing the intimacy and eroticism of appropriated sources. The texts by Renault and Barker form only a small part of a much larger genre of literature, a genre which I am now in a position to name. I propose that the texts characteristic of this genre are called 'intimatopic' for their representation of intimate worlds in which same sex relationships revolve around intimacy in various ways. As will become increasingly apparent, intimatopic texts can be found across a wide range of literature, from the historical novel to science fiction and fantasy, but even across these differing literary tropes, intimatopic texts are clearly connected by their emphasis on intimacy. Although no critical attention has yet been focused specifically on the genre of 'intimatopia' which this thesis defines and explores, there are two further 'topic' genres which have received a significant amount of critical investigation. Firstly, there is 'pornotopia'. According to Salmon and Symons' pornotopia, as defined by Steven Marcus, depicts a 'world in which sex is sheer desire and physical gratification with an endless succession of lustful physically attractive women who are always eager to have sex with strangers and who are always orgasmic'.<sup>1</sup> It will be immediately apparent that this is a vastly different world to the intimatopic one characterised by moderated eroticism and mental unity. The second topic genre is 'romantopia'. Romantopia, which is based upon the heterosexual relationships represented in the romance novels popularised by the publishers Mills and Boon in the UK and Harlequin in the US, is a genre with much closer ties to intimatopia.

Salmon and Symons define romantopia as 'a female wish-fulfilling fantasy realm' in which 'the heroine overcomes obstacles to identify, win the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Salmon and Don Symons, 'Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology', *Journal of Sex Research*, 41 (2004), 94-100 (p.96).

heart of, and eventually marry the one man in the world who is right for her'.<sup>2</sup> Although clearly distinct from intimatopic texts for their representation of heterosexual, as opposed to same sex relationships, romantopic texts share a limited number of ideologies with intimatopic ones. For instance, the heroes of romantopia tend to be 'traditionally masculine and somewhat expressive in a feminine way',<sup>3</sup> a description which is reminiscent of many intimatopic heroes including Rivers, Sassoon, Alexander, Bagoas and Laurie.<sup>4</sup> However, there are also fundamental ideological differences between the worlds of intimatopia and of romantopia and it is because of these that I do not think the texts discussed here can merely be described as same sex romantopias. Jay Dixon claims that romantopia aims to depict a love relationship in which 'the female is more powerful than the male'<sup>5</sup>; however, many of intimatopia's ideological investments, not to mention its same sex focus, avoid such simplistic power distinctions. Although intimatopia does have an ambivalent relationship to hierarchical representation, a qualification I will discuss in chapter six, its ideological investment lies more closely with the representation of a reciprocal relationship between two men whose intimacy ultimately transcends differences in power or status. In contrast to intimatopic ideologies, romantopic texts represent as ideal a marriage which 'permits the heroine to relinquish self control' so that she may end the text required to do no more than 'exist as the centre of the [hero's] attention'.<sup>6</sup> Intimatopic texts rarely end in marriage or its equivalent, and although they may represent the loss of self control through structures such as hurt/comfort, their commitment to reciprocity ensures that these depictions remain as brief moments of vulnerability, designed to facilitate intimacy, rather than permanent resolutions. Finally, although Dixon claims that readers of romantopia want to see 'a slowly [...] developing love between hero and heroine' who already share an 'emotional attachment',<sup>7</sup> in the romantopic world this attachment is often one of extreme ambivalence or even outright

<sup>2</sup> Salmon and Symons, 'Slash Fiction', p.97.

<sup>3</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London: Verso, 1987), p.216.

<sup>4</sup> See p.71 and p.100.

<sup>5</sup> Jay Dixon, *The Romantic Fiction of Mills and Boon 1909-1990's* (London: UCL press, 1999), p.144.

<sup>6</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.97.

<sup>7</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.67, p.16.

hatred. Mickey Hanlon, the heroine in Amanda Browning's Mills and Boon novel, *Enemy Within* is typical in her initial feeling that the hero is 'loathsome'.<sup>8</sup> Thus although intimatopia shares with romantopia ideologies in which love is built upon emotional attachment, in intimatopia these foundations centre around kinship and friendship, rather than hostility and mistrust. In short, romantopia, whilst representing a world, apparently not dissimilar to intimatopia, in which love and emotion are the focus of interpersonal relationships, betrays its ideological distance from intimatopia through its failure to use these features to foreground the intimacy of interpersonal interaction.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst neither pornotopic nor romantopic genres offer the intimacy of intimatopia there exists another genre in which intimacy is considered crucial. Defined by Jacqueline Lichtenberg, who explores intimacy in science fiction and fantasy, as 'intimate adventure', this genre is characterised by protagonists 'who must face trials and dangers, terrors and tests on the field of intimacy'.<sup>10</sup> Unlike pornotopia or romantopia, but in line with intimatopia, 'intimate adventure' can be sexual or non-sexual in nature and is, Lichtenberg claims, 'written by and for educated women'.<sup>11</sup> However, whilst Lichtenberg's 'intimate adventure' might include texts, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Catch Trap*, in which the primary intimate relationship is between two men, it is by no means limited to such, as are the intimatopic texts I discuss here.<sup>12</sup> What 'intimate adventure' really lacks is a definable ideological landscape. Although Lichtenberg's two articles do describe some features of the intimacy she is interested in, her main

<sup>8</sup> Amanda Browning, *Enemy Within* (Surrey: Mills and Boon, 1994) p.31. See also Michelle Reid, *Passionate Scandal*, (Surrey: Mills and Boon, 1994) for another heroine who appears at first to dislike her future husband. In fact this trait is so common in romance novels that it was a clear feature of all the randomly selected ones I read for comparison to intimatopia.

<sup>9</sup> For a long time I was puzzled as to why readers of intimatopic texts frequently claimed to detest the popular romance. I now believe that this can be explained because romances do not offer the intimacy these readers seek. In contrast to the intimatopic text, in which intimacy pervades all levels of the relationship, the intimacy of the romance novel is fleeting and often associated only with sexual interaction.

<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline Lichtenberg, 'Intimate Adventure: Genre Defined' online: <<http://www.simegen.com/intimateadventure.html>> .

<sup>11</sup> Jacqueline Lichtenberg, 'The Intimate Adventure Has Just Begun' online: <<http://www.simegen.com/school/workshop/IntimateAdventureFem.html>> .

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that although all the authors I have discussed here write about relationships between men, and although this thesis focuses on texts about male intimacy, intimatopic texts could be written about relationships between two women, or between a man and a woman. Thus whilst this thesis discusses male/male intimatopic relationships, other variations do potentially exist.



project is to expose the apparently revolutionary potential of these texts to demonstrate to men that intimacy, rather than violence, is important and hence to change the world, 'Fundamentally. Forever.'<sup>13</sup> I think Lichtenberg is correct about the existence of 'intimate adventure' as a genre, and it clearly does share some ideological perspectives and primary texts with intimatopia.<sup>14</sup> Yet despite this, I believe intimatopia should be considered as a separate genre. Thus my exploration of the ideological terrain of intimatopia does not impinge upon Lichtenberg's feminist genre of 'intimate adventure', but instead offers a new and detailed exposition of the theme of intimacy between men in women's writing.

Because of its focus on same sex interaction intimatopia might be considered by some theorists to be 'queer'. However, despite its depiction of sometimes sexual, and often eroticised, male/male interactions, intimatopia is not a queer world. There are two aspects to this assertion: the question of whether appropriative intimatopic texts can be seen as part of the practice of 'queer reading,' and the question of whether intimatopic texts are themselves 'queer'. To address the first question, although of course it is always possible to label something retrospectively, it is worth remembering that a significant number of intimatopic texts predate the practice of queer reading which only became prominent in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>15</sup> That many appropriative intimatopic texts were penned in the 1970s, suggests that the decoding and re-encoding they demonstrate does not spring from the same academic imperative that was later to drive the practice of 'queer reading'. The authorial interpretation that underlies appropriative intimatopic texts may, of course, be unrelated to the queerness or otherwise of the intimatopic text itself. Given the diversity of definitions of 'queer' it is relatively easy to insist that on some level intimatopic texts *are* queer. If something needs only to destabilise heteronormative ideologies to be classed as queer, and it is through this kind of definition that the

<sup>13</sup> Lichtenberg, 'The Intimate Adventure Has Just Begun'; Jacqueline Lichtenberg, 'A Proposal for a New Genre Name' on line:

<<http://www.simegem.com/reviews/rereadablebooks/columns/0393.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Susan Hill, *The Bird of Night* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973) and Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap* (New York: Ballantine, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Gay And After* (London: Serpents Tail, 1998).

heterosexual Sedgwick defines herself as 'queer',<sup>16</sup> then intimatopic texts clearly are queer. Despite this, I contend that the unique ideologies of intimatopic texts set them apart from what the majority of academics would consider queer. Monica B. Pearl suggests that queer, 'pertains to work that renders borders arbitrary and flexible - borders between identities, especially gender and sexual identities'.<sup>17</sup> Whilst intimatopic texts are engaged with certain flexible borders (for instance the faultline between the sexual and the intimate), one of the things they are expressly unconcerned with is sexual identity. Ambiguous intimatopias evade the whole question of orientation by their very ambiguity and even sexual intimatopias tend to depict, as Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* does, the 'solitary still making his own map'.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to intimatopia, queer worlds tend to be, as one anonymous person quoted by Jonathon Dollimore claims, 'about sex'.<sup>19</sup> Alan Sinfield's more intellectual approach to queer is likewise informed by a sexual ethic; he discusses the subordinate relation of queer subjectivity, but this subjectivity remains expressly concerned with a very sexual and sexualised identity, 'what troubles the straightgeist' he claims 'is the way we [queers] do sex'.<sup>20</sup> Valid as these sentiments are within the queer community their perspective is distinct from the ideologies of intimatopia in which sex and sexuality are often of only peripheral interest. Susan Hill, author of the ambiguous and intimatopic *Strange Meeting* dismisses sexuality as an issue which 'would not greatly alter' her text's exploration of 'human love'.<sup>21</sup> The ideological gap between this approach and the queer one which centralises sexuality and the sexual is such that I believe it inappropriate to consider intimatopia from a traditionally queer perspective.<sup>22</sup> Instead intimatopia should

<sup>16</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.253.

<sup>17</sup> Monica B. Pearl, 'Eve Sedgwick's Melancholic "White Glasses"', *Textual Practice*, 17 (2003), 61-80 (p.64).

<sup>18</sup> Mary Renault *The Charioteer* (London: Longmans Green, 1953), p.135.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathon Dollimore, *Sex, Literature and Censorship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p.9.

<sup>20</sup> Sinfield, *Gay and After*, p.128.

<sup>21</sup> Susan Hill, *Strange Meeting*, (1971 repr. London: Penguin, 1989), p.183 and p.184 All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text.

<sup>22</sup> I have already discussed how the dismissal of sexual identities common in intimatopia, in which men may fall in love and even have sex with each other without thinking themselves homosexual, may be seen as homophobic (p.57). Intimatopic texts could also be interpreted as objectionable from a queer perspective for their apparent denial of the sexual element of same sex love. This might be seen as denying sexual minorities the very sexuality that defines them. These problems once again highlight the distance between the real life concerns of queer people and the fictional world of intimatopia adding weight to my insistence that intimatopia should be defined in its own terms.

be defined in its own terms, terms which the hero of Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting*, David Barton, helps us to elucidate as he enculturates his friend John Hilliard into the world of intimatopia.

First published in 1971, *Strange Meeting* shares a literary context with Renault's sexual intimatopias about Alexander the Great. Susan Hill was born in 1942, just a year before Pat Barker, and *Strange Meeting* shares with *Regeneration* an ambiguous approach to intimatopia.<sup>23</sup> Like *Regeneration*, *Strange Meeting* is set during the years of World War One; Susan Hill however, chooses to situate her novel on or near the front line. Although *Strange Meeting* appropriates war experiences and memories and is informed by Hill's reading of 'memoirs, diaries[...]letters[...]autobiography[...]poets[...]official histories and biographies',<sup>24</sup> as Kenneth Muir points out, 'no direct borrowing can be detected.'<sup>25</sup> Like Barker's *Regeneration*, Hill's *Strange Meeting* straddles the faultline between the intimate and the sexual and, as is typical of such texts, has invited interpretations which sexualise its ambiguous cues. In fact one of the questions that Hill says she is most frequently asked about her novel by the modern reader is, 'Were Hilliard and Barton homosexual; was their relationship a fulfilled and physical one?'<sup>26</sup> Hill's answer, that neither Barton nor Hilliard seem 'clearly or unalterably gay' but that Barton was 'the sort of open, generous, warm and loving young man who would easily have formed bonds of friendship and love with a number of people, male and female as they appeared in his life',<sup>27</sup> implies her commitment to a construction in which both love and friendship inform an ambiguous intimacy. *Strange Meeting* provides the reader with a guide to the intimate territory explored through its ambiguous representation of love between men. This guide, Hill's hero David Barton, functions as an expanded version of the intratextual interpreters offered by Renault and Barker in the form of Bagoas and Ruth, guiding the reader towards

<sup>23</sup> Susan Hill has written at least one other ambiguous intimatopic novel, *The Bird of Night* but this is not appropriate in nature. Susan Hill, *The Bird of Night* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973).

<sup>24</sup> Susan Hill, on line: <[www.susan-hill.com](http://www.susan-hill.com)>.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Muir, 'Susan Hill's Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle', in *The Uses of Fiction*, ed. by Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), pp.273-285 (p.280).

<sup>26</sup> Hill, *Strange Meeting*, from the novel's 'Afterword', p.185.

<sup>27</sup> Hill, *Strange Meeting*, from the novel's 'Afterword', p.185.

the ideologies the text works to foreground. Barton also acts as a guide to his friend Hilliard taking both him and the reader on a tour of intimatopia.

### The Landscape of Intimatopia

Barton and Hilliard's mutual exploration of intimatopic ideologies is situated within a very specific environment: like all intimatopic texts Hill's *Strange Meeting* exploits an ambiguous homosocial context. I have already discussed the ambiguous and intimate potential of the trench experience (p.81) and Hill's choice to situate her intimatopic text largely within this extreme and homosocial context gives her ample opportunity to explore the intimate interactions it makes possible between men. As one reviewer of *Strange Meeting*, H.W. Van Rhijn stresses, 'under normal circumstances this friendship might never have developed to such an extent. In this war it could.'<sup>28</sup> As Van Rhijn implies, under 'normal circumstances' intimacy between men is limited by cultural constraints<sup>29</sup> and it seems that this limitation may account for the tendency of intimatopic texts to be set in abnormal circumstances; from the battle field to historical, futuristic or fantasy settings. Away from the constraints of 'normal' modern society intimatopic texts create homosocial spaces where intimacy between men is both plausible and achievable. Hill's *Strange Meeting* suggests that, by contrast, heterosocial settings do not provide the necessary inducements to intimacy. In the world of home and family, Hill's hero John Hilliard feels that 'there was nothing for him' (p.15). Hilliard has yet to discover the other, homosocial, world of intimacy and has yet to understand its ideological features. A young man whose most intimate relationship has been with his sister Beth who, it turns out, 'did not know [him] after all' (p.23), Hilliard is 'simply waiting' (p.15). It is only later that he realises he has been 'waiting for Barton' (p.57) a man with whom, in the ambiguous and homosocial context of the trenches, so different from the normal circumstances of home and family, he can experience true intimacy.

<sup>28</sup> H.W. Van Rhijn, 2001, from book reviews at amazon.co.uk on line:  
<[http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0140036954/customer-reviews/qid=1110538850/sr=1-5/ref=sr\\_1\\_11\\_5/ref=cm\\_cr\\_dp\\_2\\_1/026-9566227-2341228](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0140036954/customer-reviews/qid=1110538850/sr=1-5/ref=sr_1_11_5/ref=cm_cr_dp_2_1/026-9566227-2341228)>.

<sup>29</sup> Don Clark, 'Homosexual Encounter in all Male Groups', in *Men and Masculinity*, ed. by Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), pp.88-93 (p.88).



The first feature of intimatopia that Barton guides Hilliard towards is one of the most salient both within *Strange Meeting* and the genre as a whole: the 'face-to-face' style of interaction. Because of their interest in reciprocity, intimatopias are face-to-face, rather than side-by-side, worlds and are characterised by emotional openness.<sup>30</sup> The open communication established through face-to-face relationships facilitates the genre's interest in reciprocity between closely bonded individuals. Many sources attest to the fact that the trenches of the First World War provided a setting, unlike that of the wider society, in which a more intimate style of interaction became possible.<sup>31</sup> These historical possibilities are exploited by Susan Hill, who is able to use re-encoding in a similar way to both Barker and Renault, to create an atmosphere of intimacy around appropriated details. When Hilliard first meets Barton and is confronted by his emotionally open intimatopic behaviour he is shocked by it. Used to more reserved interactions he is of the opinion that 'it was all very well to feel something, to think it, but not to say so openly' (p.47). Unused to Barton's face-to-face interaction Hilliard asks, 'do you always tell people everything you're feeling?', 'Generally' replies Barton, our guide to communication in intimatopia (p.55). Despite his reservations Hilliard finds himself becoming one half of a reciprocal face-to-face relationship. Taking his lead from Barton's insistence on the sharing of experiences: 'go on. Tell me', Hilliard finds that suddenly 'He could talk,[...] could tell him anything' and it 'was not difficult, after all' (p.57). Demonstrating how intimatopic texts use face-to-face interaction to serve their interest in mental unity, Barton and Hilliard's reciprocal communication goes beyond the spoken word. For Hilliard accepts that whatever he feels Barton will understand, 'would *know*' (p.61). Hill's decision to italicise '*know*' shows how important a place *knowing* has in Intimatopia, it stands for the emotionally frank and honest communication that characterises face-to-face interaction and hints at intimatopia's ideological commitment to a reciprocal communion that goes beyond the verbal and extends into the mental plane, a communion by which 'a stranger' may become 'entirely familiar' (p.61). Thus Hill appropriates historical

<sup>30</sup> See p.94 for a more detailed discussion of this distinction.

<sup>31</sup> Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London: Virago, 1990), see also Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

details suggesting that men's relationships were more intense in the context of the war, and uses them to provide a plausible justification for the intimatopic relationships she draws.

Having established the mental unity of the relationship which situates it, alongside that shared by Alexander and Hephaistion, as one in which two individuals share the same soul, Hill follows the typical ideological pattern of intimatopic texts by adding physical cues to the mental bond she depicts. Like Barker, Hill achieves this by appropriating the physicality of trench experience, re-encoding it in distinctive ways when she wishes it to signal intimacy. Thus Hill's text contains two types of physical interaction, the homosocial and the homosocially intimate. These two styles of re-encoding form a distinct contrast to one another and allow us to further examine the unique structure of intimatopic representations. The non-intimatopic but homosocial re-encoding of the physicality of the trenches occurs between Barton and Harris, two men who do not share an intimate relationship. Harris has hidden in a cellar where he attempts to retreat from the dangers of the front line, and Barton is able to comfort him by offering his touch: 'he put out his hand and found Harris's wrist and held it' (p.86). In contrast to this scene, where the comforting touch does not signal intimacy, Hill offers us an intimatopic re-encoding which occurs between Barton and Hilliard. In this scene Barton has been comforted by Hilliard's understanding and is expressing his thanks: 'Barton stood up and put his arm across Hilliard's shoulders' [...] He said, "I love you, John." ' (p.129-130). The homosocial re-encoding between Barton and Harris contains only physical cues: 'hand' 'held' 'wrist', it contains no cues associated with reciprocity or mental unity and instead highlights Barton's feeling of 'inadequacy' and fear that his words are 'meaningless' (p.87). Although Barton and Harris are alone in the cellar their interaction is interrupted by the sounds of other men who could be heard 'on the floor overhead' (p.86) and thus the situation does not provide the privacy typical of intimatopic re-encodings. The intimatopic incident between Barton and Hilliard, on the other hand, takes place in a tent which the two men share and is interrupted only by 'a gust of wind' (p.129), this is a setting far more suggestive of the privatisation of interpersonal interaction characteristic of

intimatopias which tend to isolate their heroes in natural surroundings.<sup>32</sup> The intimatopic re-encoding is also reminiscent of the hurt/comfort structure discussed in the previous chapter. Hilliard's 'hurt' is the mental distress caused by his temporary distance from Barton, and Barton's physical gesture of reassurance provides the appropriate image of 'comfort'. Hurt/comfort may be employed to facilitate the representation of several intimatopic ideologies and in this case it is being used to create a situation where a reciprocal bond may be extended across both the mental and the physical plane. The intimatopic re-encoding signals its intimacy by combining physical cues with emotional ones derived from the feminine ideologies of face-to-face communication discussed above. Through this scene Barton and Hilliard are depicted as sharing a relationship in which they can express their feelings in both mental and physical terms, completing the picture of intimatopia's ideological interest in relationships that traverse both planes.

The intimate passage described above is also indicative of the intimatopic text's ideological engagement with moderated eroticism. The intimate moment between Barton and Hilliard adds to its re-encoding of the physicality of the trenches the emotionally ambiguous, but often erotic, cue 'love'. However, the eroticism that might be suggested by the expression of physical affection motivated by love is carefully moderated by the textual context. The ellipsis I have been adding to the intimate interaction - 'Barton stood up and put his arm across Hilliard's shoulders' [...] He said, "I love you, John." ' (p.129-130), have concealed the text's moderation of the eroticism of this passage. For in fact, 'Barton let his arm drop, *and moved a pace away*' before he said, "'I love you, John.'" ' (p.130 emphasis mine). Thus the physical is constrained just as it meets the intimate, moderating the eroticism the two elements often create together and suggesting that Barton's 'love' is motivated by intimacy more than erotic attraction. In this way Barton's behaviour once again serves as our guide to intimatopia: the intimatopic relationship traverses both the mental and physical

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<sup>32</sup> The reader will probably be reminded of the nineteenth century American adventures where two male heroes, for instance Chingachgook and Hawk-eye in James Fenimore Cooper's leather-stocking series, were isolated in a wilderness. This male authored genre is no doubt an antecedent of modern intimatopic texts (see p.232 for more details).



plane; however its eroticism is moderated by ideologies that centralise intimacy rather than physical attraction.

The contrasting homosocial and intimatopic interactions described in the previous paragraphs can be compared using the chart I have adapted for discussing intimatopic re-encodings. The red star shows the homosocial re-encoding of physicality found between Barton and Harris and the white one the intimate re-encoding found between Hilliard and Barton.

**Hill's Intimatopic Re-encodings**



By turning back to p.99 and comparing this to the chart called 'Barker's Intimate Re-encodings' it is immediately apparent that re-encodings associated with intimatopic ideologies have a distinctive pattern which contextualises cues towards the upper right corner of the chart. Hill achieves this in two ways: firstly her use of face-to-face communication which allows her to create scenes in which the two men share intimate revelations in a way more typical of female friendship, and secondly, by her addition of physical gestures of affection to her representation of love. These strategies combine in *Strange Meeting* to showcase the genre's most central ideological interest: the combination of love, friendship and intimacy.

I have already discussed the re-encodings in Barker's and Renault's texts, in which images, such as eye contact and friendship, become indicative of the private interactions between two individuals. This exclusivity is a consistent feature of intimatopia, one which Hill chooses to explore through images of possessiveness and protectiveness. These cues, which have been re-encoded from

a wealth of trench literature, were often part of what historian Paul Fussell characterises as the “‘idealistic’”, passionate but non-physical “‘crushes’” that developed between officers and men.<sup>33</sup> As Hill’s text progresses, appropriated elements of possessiveness and protectiveness become increasingly indicative of a privatised interpersonal intimacy. Hilliard’s desire to protect Barton emerges on the first evening of their acquaintance when Hilliard ‘felt himself ready to defend Barton’ because, he rationalises, ‘we need him’ (p.49). After a time this desire becomes more acute and more personal: ‘Hilliard thought he would do anything now, anything at all for [Barton] not to have to go’ to the front, ‘not to see any more’ of the war (p.74). His motivation moves from a generalised desire to keep Barton for the improvement of the group spirit, towards a more personal desire to keep Barton for himself: ‘He thought, we need him, we need what he has to give us. *I need him.*’ (p.62). Once again Hill’s italics highlight her interest in the privatised intimacy she is describing, one which is characterised by possessiveness, for Hill claims that Hilliard ‘wanted to keep Barton to himself’ (p.65). This possessiveness, the desire for exclusivity between two individuals, becomes increasingly apparent as Hilliard becomes more deeply enculturated into intimatopia. For Hill also showcases the unity of two privileged in intimatopia by using an image which is perhaps the negative side of possessiveness: jealousy. Hilliard, watching Barton talk to another man, Glazier, notes that Barton ‘seemed to come alive for Glazier’ and, observing this, he ‘felt jealousy rising in him’ and ‘began to hate Glazier’. Confronted with these feelings Hilliard wonders ‘what has Glazier got, what does he say or do, that I cannot?’ (p.122) These possessive cues are made increasingly intimate by Hill’s re-encoding of the male gaze. This is another common feature of intimatopic texts which can be made to serve many of its ideological concerns and I have discussed Barker’s interest in it on p.92. In its use of this image *Strange Meeting* journeys towards a privatised intimacy which is exclusive to the individuals who experience it. Early in the novel Hilliard ‘found himself watching Barton’ (p.48) a watching which becomes increasingly personal until Hilliard found he ‘had not wanted to take his eyes away. For [Barton] was there, now, across the tiny, dark space of the dugout, everything of him was there, his skin and flesh and bone,

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<sup>33</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.270.

whole and unblemished' (p.104). The exclusivity of this intimate gazing is not only highlighted by the small enclosed space of the trench but by the surrounding contextual cues. Indeed immediately following this description Hill makes clear that Hilliard has only experienced this kind of intimacy with Barton for, 'in a second of absolute clarity, [Hilliard] saw that [...]he loved [Barton] as he had loved no other person in his life'.(p.105)

Hill's re-encodings of possessiveness, protectiveness and jealousy are all used to demonstrate the exclusivity of the intimatopic relationship, but they also contribute to the text's ideological concern with moderated eroticism. Several critics have noticed the erotic connotations associated with jealousy and have based their sexual readings of ambiguous texts upon its manifestation. Lincoln Geraghty's sexual reading of the ambiguous cues from *Star Trek Deep Space Nine* and Anna Smol's reading of the male intimacies of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* both show how jealousy may be interpreted as an erotic cue.<sup>34</sup> This may be a result of the extra-textual connotations of jealousy, as well as protectiveness and possessiveness, which are all used to be indicative of erotic attraction in heteroerotic sources such as the romantopic novels of Mills and Boon. These heteroerotic texts often, as Salmon and Symons claim, depict a hero who 'is sexually jealous of the heroine', 'wants to protect the heroine' and 'is possessive of the heroine'.<sup>35</sup> The importing of cues which signal heteroerotic attraction is a re-encoding strategy also employed by Pat Barker in her use of eye contact and romantic narrative and Hill uses it here with jealousy, possessiveness and protectiveness. These images, all of which are readily appropriated from war literature, combine historical plausibility with modern connotive associations familiar from the heteroerotic text. The erotic cues provided by the extra-textual referents add to the apparent intimacy of Hill's ambiguous text. The eroticised intimacy which this kind of depiction creates, and which is so common to intimatopia, is a result of its ideological engagement with the faultline between

<sup>34</sup> Anna Smol, "'Oh...Oh...Frodo!'" Readings of Male Intimacy in *The Lord of The Rings*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50 (2004), 948-979; Lincoln Geraghty, 'Homosocial Desire on the Final Frontier: Kinship, The American Romance, and *Deep Space Nine*'s "Erotic Triangles"', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 36 (2003), 441-465.

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Salmon and Don Symons, *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001), p.64. See also Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*.

the intimate and the sexual. Because of the cultural uncertainty that surrounds the boundary between the sexual and the intimate, otherwise sexual cues can be put to use in the representation of ambiguous intimacy thereby helping to create the moderated eroticism of the intimatopic text. Hill's use of possessiveness, protectiveness and jealousy thus serves several of the functions of the intimatopic text. The open expression of all these emotions demonstrates reciprocal face-to-face interaction, the emotions themselves are used to suggest the private and exclusive nature of the relationship and the extra-textual connotations they bring with them facilitate the text's engagement with moderated eroticism. Finally the situation of these emotions on the cultural faultline between the sexual and the intimate allows them to reflect the central ideological concern of intimatopic texts: the weaving together of the erotic and the intimate into a holistic relationship which combines love, friendship and intimacy.

Intimatopia is world in which emotional bonds between men transcend the homosocial interaction more often labelled 'friendship' in our society. As Barton and Hilliard make clear not all friendship is intimate, but their open, reciprocal and exclusive relationship is. Homosocial friendship which occurs in 'the big outer circle of friends' is, Barton claims, 'easy' (p.158). But Barton knows that this is 'another matter all together' from the intimate relationship he shares with Hilliard which doesn't happen 'often in a lifetime' (p.159). The crucial difference that separates Barton and Hilliard's intimatopic relationship from all others has been hinted at by several of the formulations already discussed; Barton and Hilliard's intimacy combines both love and friendship. The relationship is denoted as 'friendship' (p.159) and yet the emotion that drives it is, for both men, 'love' (p.105 and p.130). This conflation, which might prove contradictory within some ideologies, situates intimatopia firmly astride the cultural faultline between the intimate and the sexual. Like the relationships that developed in the trenches that were 'difficult' for Peter Parker 'to define'<sup>36</sup> and which defied Santanu Das' attempts to classify them as either 'homosociability' or

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987), p.175.



'homosexualism',<sup>37</sup> Hilliard and Barton's relationship is difficult even for Hill to define. However despite the representational difficulties often encountered, Barton's relationship with Hilliard is consistent with Hill's interpretive strategy within which love and friendship are mutually supportive and combine in intimacy. Informed by this central ideological perspective, the surrounding landscape of intimatopia includes: a commitment to reciprocal relationships that traverse both the mental and the physical plane, a belief that men can share intense relationships in which intimacy is exclusive to the individuals who experience it, and an assumption that intimacy is ultimately of more import than the erotic or sexual bonds which may inform it.

### Intimatopia: A Women's World?

For some readers, the intimacy of the relationship Susan Hill describes makes *Strange Meeting* an unconvincing depiction of male interaction. One reviewer, Duncan, writes that: 'British military men don't do that sort of thing.'<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly the moments Duncan finds unconvincing are those where love and friendship are linked together under the banner of intimacy, specifically the moment when Barton puts his arm round Hilliard and tells him he loves him. It is interesting that in contrast female commentators have praised the text's 'convincing depiction of life from a male view point'.<sup>39</sup> Once again it seems that intimatopia is a world which is based upon ideological perspectives more common to women than to men: women tend to find this world plausible, men often do not. I have already discussed in the previous chapter how the face-to-face communication style of intimatopia might be considered feminine and indeed Hill's intimatopic perspective on communication between men, makes an interesting contrast to Marc Fasteau's male perspective as presented in his essay published in 1974. Fasteau writes 'Can you imagine men talking to each other saying: 'Are you sure you're not angry with me?', or 'I feel nervous talking to

<sup>37</sup> Santanu Das, "'Kiss me Hardy': Intimacy, Gender and Gesture in World War 1 Trench Literature', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9 (2002), 51-74 (p.54).

<sup>38</sup> Duncan, 1999 from book reviews at amazon.co.uk on line: <[http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0140036954/customer-reviews/qid=1110538850/sr=1-5/ref=sr\\_1\\_11\\_5/ref=cm\\_cr\\_dp\\_2\\_1/026-9566227-2341228](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/stores/detail/-/books/0140036954/customer-reviews/qid=1110538850/sr=1-5/ref=sr_1_11_5/ref=cm_cr_dp_2_1/026-9566227-2341228)>.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Willy, 'Susan Hill', in *Contemporary Novelists*, ed. by D.L. Kirkpatrick (London: St James Press, 1981), pp.417-418 (p.418).

you like this'?' He concludes that within male friendship, 'It just doesn't happen.'<sup>40</sup> However, it does happen in Susan Hill's *Strange Meeting*. Barton initiates it, by announcing to Hilliard, 'To tell you the truth I was frightened to death of you!' (p.47). By the latter half of the novel the two men are exchanging emotional intimacies such as: 'What has happened to me?', 'I am afraid of myself, of what I am becoming,' asking each other 'how do you feel?', and even proclaiming: 'I love you.' (p.127; p.128; p.137; p.130). Although Marc Fasteau and Susan Hill were writing within 5 years of each other, Susan Hill clearly could imagine men talking to one another in just the way Fasteau found so implausible. Whilst the historical setting of Hill's novel means that her depiction of men's communication is plausible within the context she places it, the ideologies informing that re-encoding are clearly at odds with those expressed by many of her male contemporaries. This raises, once again, the question of masculine and feminine interpretive communities and the differing ideological assumptions that inform them.

As I have shown in previous chapters, the intimacy the intimatopic text presents is often engendered by the inclusion of so called feminine ideals, such as face-to-face interaction (p.94) and mental and physical reciprocity (p.59). It is also true that the male heroes of intimatopic texts are somewhat feminised. Lamb and Veith list as traits which may mark a fictional character as feminine, 'emotional', 'intuitive', 'physical' and 'verbal'.<sup>41</sup> The longer Hilliard knows Barton the more emotional he becomes, experiencing fear at the thought of Barton's death, jealousy at his other friendships and 'a rush of joy' (p.159) when he finds their own friendship is unique. Hilliard also becomes increasingly intuitive knowing when 'to listen' and when 'to prompt' (p.126), he accepts the physical as part of intimacy and finds that verbal expression is not 'so difficult after all' (p.57). Lamb and Veith also suggest that feminine characters are 'fulfilled only with another person'<sup>42</sup> and Hilliard reiterates several times how much he needs Barton, telling him: 'I haven't your naturally buoyant

<sup>40</sup> Marc Fasteau, 'Why Aren't We Talking?', in *Men and Masculinity*, pp.19-21 (p.19).

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith, 'Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines', in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.235-255 (p.243).

<sup>42</sup> Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth', p.243.



outlook[...]that's why I need you around.' (p.155) Hilliard adds the feminine traits he gains through his intimatopic relationship, to other traits which Lamb and Veith suggest mark a fictional character as masculine, for he is rational, controlled and keeps others (except Barton) at a distance.<sup>43</sup> Thus Hilliard's enculturation into intimatopia parallels his acquisition of an increasing number of feminine traits so that the eventual result is a hero who blends traits considered masculine with those considered feminine.<sup>44</sup> It is clear that gender blended heroes would greatly facilitate the representation of many of intimatopia's ideological concerns; they would willingly engage in reciprocal face-to-face communication, easily express empathy, comfortably offer gestures of physical comfort and delight in exclusivity. The usefulness of the gender blended hero within intimatopia is clear, and this textual feature has often been associated with other types of 'feminine' literature such as the romance novels of Mills and Boon.<sup>45</sup> In line with this Salmon and Symons suggest that female readers in general are drawn to male characters and male relationships which, while retaining traditionally masculine cues, also contain elements of 'love, commitment[...] and nurturing' which they claim are more commonly considered feminine.<sup>46</sup> If gender blending heroes represent some kind of ideal for a significant number of women then it could certainly be connected to the prevalence of such men in intimatopic fiction.<sup>47</sup>

The gender blending which parallels a hero's intimatopic development can be linked to other patterns of so called 'feminine' literature, which Jay Dixon suggests have an ideological interest in showing how men may be 'socialized[...]into the female sphere'.<sup>48</sup> Although Dixon assumes that these ideologies are incompatible with texts that depict same sex interaction, there is no reason why the text's 'female sphere' should be a literal one. Indeed the

<sup>43</sup> Traits from, Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth', p.243.

<sup>44</sup> Barton too is a gender blended hero, however I have chosen to discuss Hilliard here as his gender blending is progressive throughout the text, showing how he is influenced by the intimatopic ideologies Barton espouses.

<sup>45</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*; Dixon, *The Romantic Fiction of Mills and Boon*; Salmon and Symons, 'Slash Fiction'.

<sup>46</sup> Salmon and Symons, *Warrior Lovers*, p.62.

<sup>47</sup> For more details about the use of gender blending in intimatopic texts see Elizabeth Woledge, 'From Slash to the Mainstream: Female Writers and Gender Blending Men' *Extrapolation*, 46 (2005), 50-65.

<sup>48</sup> Dixon, *The Romantic Fiction of Mills and Boon*, p.163.

ideologies of intimatopia might be considered such a female sphere themselves and hence Hilliard's enculturation into them, although engendered by his relationship with another man, may be just such a feminine socialisation. Intimatopic texts might be seen as using re-encoding to bring men in line with the feminine ideologies they express. This may not take the form of a deliberate reshaping of masculinity, but may instead be the result of female authors decoding and re-encoding male interaction through the ideologies privileged within their own interpretive communities. Indeed, I have already discussed the issue of cultural resonance and how decoding and hence re-encoding become inflected with ideologies common to the authors' cultural context. Comparing women's interpretations from both academic and literary fields there is ample evidence to suggest that, on average, women interpret similar things in similar ways. Historian of the First World War Lynne Segal writes that 'the intimacy, unlikely friendships, and extreme male bonding of men on the battlefield can [...] evoke the intense emotional compassion, self sacrifice, love and devotion associated more with "femininity."' <sup>49</sup> What is interesting about this commentary is that, although it comes from a very different perspective to Hill's fictional work, the re-encoding it makes of male interaction is strikingly similar. Both Hill and Segal highlight 'love', 'friendship' and 'intimacy' and Segal chooses terms like 'bonding' and 'devotion' which suggest the unity, reciprocity and exclusivity evoked by the intimatopic text. Hill and Segal are not the only ones to comment on the First World War from an intimatopic perspective but join the novelist Pat Barker and academics Santanu Das and Anna Smol in re-encoding the war in intimatopic ways. <sup>50</sup> Thus it seems that when faced with certain descriptions of male interaction, especially ones that have some element of erotic ambiguity, women are likely to interpret these things in similar and distinctive ways.

Susan Hill claims that she read historical sources until she 'could read no more' after which she felt that 'various things crystallised, by themselves,' in her

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<sup>49</sup> Segal, *Slow Motion*, p.142

<sup>50</sup> Barker, *Regeneration*; Das, 'Kiss me Hardy'; Smoll, 'Oh...Oh...Frodo!'. Interestingly Das is a male academic though his intimatopic perspective, at least in this paper, is clear. This is just one example which demonstrates that a minority of men can and do make use of intimatopic ideologies.

mind.<sup>51</sup> Whilst it is impossible to really know what this crystallization describes, it is highly suggestive of the impact that Hill's internalised ideologies had on her decoding of her historical sources. If ideological influence is as insidious as Althusser suggests when he claims that we are 'steeped'<sup>52</sup> in it, then the feeling that ideologically informed interpretations appear 'by themselves' might not be uncommon. Thus steeped in the ideologies of intimacy, common amongst certain communities of westernised women, Hill interpreted her sources through an intimatopic lens. The existence of such a lens is also suggested by the implications of research by linguistic psychologist David Bleich who's investigations into the process of interpretation and retelling suggest that women are more likely than men to retell a story in terms of 'human relationships', 'interpersonal motives, allegiances and conflicts'.<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein, evolutionary psychologist David Geary believes that women 'tend to maintain more [...] intimate social relationships' than men do and to show more 'emotional empathy' towards their friends. He claims that, on average, women show 'greater elaboration of those cognitive competencies associated with one-to-one social relationships' than men do.<sup>54</sup> Thus it would not be implausible to suggest that women tend to have cultural competencies associated with the decoding and understanding of close interpersonal relationships which are reflected in their interpretive practice. Although intimatopic writers are mostly women and intimatopic interpretations can be connected to psychological traits more common amongst women, I must stress that not all women work from an intimatopic perspective. After all it is clear that women can and do also write from pornotopic and romantopic positions, amongst many others. An interest in interpersonal relationships can be seen informing intimatopia, romantopia and even pornotopia, but these three forms of literature appear to spring from different interpretive communities. Thus it appears that an interest in

<sup>51</sup> Susan Hill, on line: <[www.susan-hill.com](http://www.susan-hill.com)>.

<sup>52</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), p.128.

<sup>53</sup> David Bleich, 'Gender Interests in Reading and Language', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Tests, and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart pp.234-266 (p.256, p.261); David Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), p.311.

<sup>54</sup> Geary, *Male, Female*, p.173, p.175 and p.302

relationships is common to many women but can be further subdivided, and that one group in particular has a specific interest in the ideologies of intimacy.<sup>55</sup>

In the previous chapter I discussed the existence of a hypothetical interpretive community for whom intimacy is central to reading and writing practice. Just as I have explored the intimatopic genre of literature produced by this community, I am now in a position to discuss the interpretive community itself. Only in exceptional cases, such as with the groups of slash fiction writers to be discussed in chapter five, can the interpretive community associated with intimatopia be viewed as any kind of real life community. However the women who come together through their involvement with intimatopic slash fiction are part of a much larger group of intimatopic interpreters who are mostly unknown to one another and between whom the idea of 'community' remains only hypothetically realised. The dispersed and often diverse women who write intimatopic texts form a community only in the sense that they can be linked by the interpretive strategies and ideologies they share. Previous chapters have mentioned a resonance between feminist discourses and intimatopic interpretive strategies; however Susan Hill, clearly an intimatopic writer, has no manifest connection with feminist discourses. Thus it seems that the connection to feminism is due simply to the fact that a significant number of feminists share a constellation of ideologies with intimatopic writers. Within the generally hypothetical intimatopic interpretive community, men's relationships are being interpreted and re-encoded through a style of interaction generally considered feminine. This process involves re-encoding relationships between men through the central intimatopic ideologies that connect love, friendship and intimacy. The re-encoding that results is likely to show distinctive features including: ambiguous homosocial contexts, intense relationships in which intimacy is exclusive to the individuals who experience it, heroes whose stereotypically feminine traits facilitate their intimate interaction with each other, reciprocal relationships which combine mental and physical unity, and a moderated eroticism.

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<sup>55</sup> The separateness of intimatopic and romantopic interpretive perspectives is further suggested by the fact that as both Jay Dixon and Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge 1990) point out, romance novels tend to reject same sex intimacy and readers of intimatopia often claim to detest romance novels.



Rosemary Jackson suggests that Susan Hill's work is directly involved with the 'problems of female survival' and that her texts betray a longing for 'warmth/summer/fertility'.<sup>56</sup> This leads her to a very bleak interpretation of *Strange Meeting* which in its depiction of Barton's death, she claims, 'ends by silencing its own timorous interrogation of some of the fatal and crippling effects of a patriarchal "male" culture and retreats into a familiar "female" enclosure of defeatism'.<sup>57</sup> This is to consider Hill's text, in rather limited terms, as an extension of what Jackson perceives as Hill's life under patriarchy. A very different conclusion may be reached by considering Hill's text, not as a reflection of her life as a woman, but as a reflection of her ideological perspective. In ideological terms Hill's, and other intimatopic texts, are far from defeatist in their implicit or explicit critique of hegemonic ideological assumptions. Although Barton dies in the war, he has achieved his textual function of enculturating Hilliard into intimatopia, for Hilliard 'had ceased to want to draw back from [...]intimacy' (p.100). Barton may be dead, but the intimatopic ideologies he espouses do not die with him. The text may be read in far less 'timorous' terms by focusing on Hilliard's education and the concurrent questioning of hegemonic ideologies that suggest love and friendship are oppositional, that sex is of more importance than intimacy and that 'masculinity' rules out the 'possibility of nurturant behaviour'.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore Barton's death may be connected to the ambiguous structure of *Strange Meeting*. The death of one of two closely intimate friends is a feature of many ambiguous texts functioning to keep the intimacy within limits and allowing the text to indefinitely straddle the faultline between the sexual and the intimate. Barton's death allows hegemonic ideologies to be questioned whilst infinitely suspending the intimate relationship depicted in all its ambiguity. By maintaining the ambiguity of the relationship hegemonic ideologies may be questioned from an implicitly dominant cultural position.

Whilst the ambiguous intimatopic text is clear in its engagement with the faultline between the sexual and the intimate, sexual intimatopias may, at first,

<sup>56</sup> Rosemary Jackson, 'Cold Enclosures: The Fiction of Susan Hill' in, *Twentieth - Century Women Novelists*, ed by Thomas F. Staley (London: Macmillan , 1984), pp.81-103 (p.82).

<sup>57</sup> Jackson, 'Cold Enclosures', p.103.

<sup>58</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.216.

appear to interpret all intimacy as sexual. Indeed, the more sexual the intimatopic text the harder it can be to see how the love it depicts remains crucially connected to friendship across the sexual/intimate faultline. I have already discussed how Mary Renault's relatively discreet sexual texts share a perspective with ambiguous intimatopic texts, however even graphically sexual texts may be intimatopic in nature and may use similar textual devices to explore intimacy. Although at first the sexual intimatopic text may appear to have no need for the intimacy inducing structures employed by the ambiguous text, since the sexual element will readily provide images of intimacy, it is for this very reason that sexually explicit intimatopias may have to work even harder to achieve their centralisation of intimacy. In order to give intimacy the import it has in intimatopic texts, writers of sexually explicit material may use very similar structures: hurt/comfort, face-to-face communication, reciprocity, mental unity, gender blending, exclusivity and even moderated eroticism. Mel Keegan's intimatopic but explicitly sexual texts are written under a male guise, published by Gay Men's Press and ostensibly marketed towards a male readership. The dust jacket of the Gay Men's Press edition of Keegan's *Fortunes of War*, claims that Keegan's world is one in which men 'both fight and love'.<sup>59</sup> This image suggests that the friendship of the texts examined so far is here replaced with the antipathy more typical of romantopia. In fact however, as I shall discuss in the following chapter, Keegan's graphically sexual novels are at pains to reproduce the central ideologies of intimatopia which link love and friendship, and the 'fighting' turns out to be the mutual endeavour of two friends united by their love and intimacy, working together to defeat a common enemy. Keegan, whether ostensibly writing for a male or female audience, for she does both under different names, consistently produces texts which explore the intimatopic possibilities of sexual interaction.

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<sup>59</sup> Mel Keegan, *Fortunes of War* (1995, repr. Brighton: The Gay Men's Press, 2000)



**Chapter Four**  
**Mel Keegan**  
**Making Love in Intimatopia**

Mel Keegan, writer of a variety of novels from the historical to the futuristic, 'lives in south Australia with an eccentric family and a variety of pets'.<sup>1</sup> Although the consideration of Mary Renault's novels offered in chapter one has already provided some insight into the structures of intimacy in sexual texts, Keegan's novels are the most graphically sexual of the intimatopic texts considered thus far. Whilst the occasional reader interprets Renault's rather genteel texts solely in terms of intimacy, appearing not to notice their sexual elements, no one could fail to notice the erotic content of Keegan's novels. The two historical novels by Keegan which will illustrate this chapter, *Fortunes of War* and *An East Wind Blowing*, were published in 1995 and 1999 respectively and thus emerged into a very different sexual climate from Renault's novels of the 1950s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The fact that novels by Keegan and Renault share an ideological perspective despite the cultural changes that separate them, suggests the enduring nature of intimatopic interpretive practices. That these practices traverse different genres as well as historical contexts is suggested by the fact that Keegan's novels would probably be considered less 'literary' than any of the texts considered so far.<sup>3</sup> From the interpretive practices showcased by the appropriations explored in previous chapters, I have extracted the literary features and ideological underpinnings of intimatopia and these may now be discerned in texts, like Keegan's, which are not directly appropriative in nature. Unlike the writers already considered, who start from specific historical sources and re-encode them via their own ideologies, Keegan's texts are less inflected with direct historical appropriation. Keegan uses history only as a background

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<sup>1</sup> On line: <[www.dream-craft.com/melkeegan/home1.htm](http://www.dream-craft.com/melkeegan/home1.htm)> . Although they include historical romances, futuristic fantasies, modern adventures and science fiction, all of Keegan's 15 professionally published novels are intimatopic in nature. In this thesis I address just two of her novels, chosen because their historical settings connect them to the other appropriative texts considered here.

<sup>2</sup> Mel Keegan, *An East Wind Blowing* (London: The Gay Men's Press, 1999); Mel Keegan, *Fortunes of War* (1995, repr. Brighton: The Gay Men's Press, 2000) All further references to these editions will be in parentheses in the main body of the text, following the abbreviations *EWB* and *FWO*.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as far as I am aware, as of 2005, Keegan's texts have attracted no critical attention.

and although she claims that 'research is one of the best parts of being a writer',<sup>4</sup> her texts are the least overtly appropriative considered in detail in this thesis. Nonetheless the same ideologies that have been found in more appropriative texts, both sexual and ambiguous, can clearly be traced amongst the sexual relationships that Keegan depicts. From her homosocial backgrounds, to her perhaps surprising investment in moderated eroticism, Keegan clearly inflects her texts with the ideologies of intimatopia, her central concern circling around the connections between love, friendship and intimacy.

Although Keegan's novels are not overtly appropriative, they nevertheless make the choice, typical of intimatopias, to situate their male heroes in ambiguous homosocial contexts. These contexts have the same function in Keegan's novels as do the wars, hospitals and military campaigns in Renault's, Hill's and Barker's.<sup>5</sup> All these contexts, like the wildernesses and rivers of much nineteenth century American literature, function as a 'disavowal of the conventional'<sup>6</sup> providing closed homosocial spaces,<sup>7</sup> within which intimatopia's representation of intense and exclusive relationships between men becomes plausible. *Fortunes of War*, which begins in 1588, is set largely on islands and ships where, in contrast to 'the conventional' Renaissance conception of sodomy as 'sin', men may 'kiss' become 'bedmates' and 'fall in love' (*FOW* p.198, p.186). *An East Wind Blowing* is set in the dark ages, where the two heroes live within the closed homosocial society at 'Eboracum' where the warriors claim of themselves, 'some of us are friends, some are lovers, all are sword brothers' (p.113), appearing to draw little distinction between the three possibilities. Within these unconventional homosocial settings Keegan's representation of love between men is not historically implausible, for in each period she draws upon genuine historical ambiguities surrounding homosocial interaction. Renaissance

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<sup>4</sup> From interview with Leslie Peterson, November 2002, on line: <[www.dream-craft.com/melkeegan/home1.htm](http://www.dream-craft.com/melkeegan/home1.htm)>.

<sup>5</sup> Though beyond the scope of my current thesis, it is curious how at odds intimatopia's depiction of war is with concerns, persisting to this day, about homosexuals in the military.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1957), p.148.

<sup>7</sup> According to Jacob Stockinger the use of a closed homosocial space is a 'homotextual' trait. As quoted in Berthold Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.176.

attitudes to love between men varied according to place and circumstance,<sup>8</sup> and the history of the dark ages is so uncertain that, despite many books debating the subject of sexual interaction between men,<sup>9</sup> as Allen Frantzen points out, 'we do not have enough information to decide the matter either way.'<sup>10</sup> Although historians generally agree that official attitudes towards sex between men, in both the Renaissance and the dark ages, were not tolerant<sup>11</sup> Keegan's use of culturally isolated settings allows her to create plausible environments for the relationships she depicts. The historical contexts function, as they do in more appropriative texts, to provide the potential for intimacy which Keegan then exploits through her specific encodings.

Historical circumstances and cultural distance conspire to make many historical sources ambiguous and modern readers are often unable to decide whether specific elements refer to sexual or social behaviour. Many historical cues appear to reference what Sinfield terms 'something like homosexuality' where 'it is not really clear how far we are looking at friendship and how far at a sexual relationship'.<sup>12</sup> This is the case for both the Renaissance and the dark ages and many sources from these eras appear to describe a time when sexual love and friendship were more easily connected than they are today. For instance, within the dark ages, historian Allen J. Frantzen claims that same sex relations were best understood as being 'inclusive of gestures of affection' and that, 'where other social forms and conventions are involved – that is male

<sup>8</sup> Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) This text provides a particularly good overview of the varieties of latitude and condemnation shown towards homosexual behaviour.

<sup>9</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); John Boswell, *The Marriage of Likeness: Same Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Harper Collins, 1995); Francesca Sutman, "'Just Like a Woman': Queer History, Womanising The Body and The Boys in Arnaud's Band', in *Queering The Middle Ages*, ed. by Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same Sex Love From 'Beowulf' to 'Angels In America'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> For historians on sexuality in the Renaissance see: Stephen Orgel, 'Nobody's Perfect, or Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?', in *Displacing Homophobia: Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Ronald R. Butters, John M. Clum, and Michael Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp.7-27; Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982). For historians on sexuality in the dark ages see: Sutman, 'Just Like a Woman'; Frantzen, *Before the Closet*.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Gay And After* (London: Serpents Tail, 1998), p.194.

camaraderie, familial bonds, religious devotion – [there is a] [...] surprising latitude in expressing male/male affection.’<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, many sources from the English Renaissance display a mixture of cues which appear to reference friendship and those which appear to reference sexuality. Probably the most famous of these sources are Shakespeare’s sonnets which illustrate a distinct lack of certainty about where the boundary between the social and the sexual lay.<sup>14</sup> Thus both the Renaissance and the dark ages are eras that resonate strongly with the central ideologies of intimatopia connecting the love, friendship and intimacy which appeared to be such a logical triad to Mary Renault when she appropriated it from Plato’s *Symposium*.

### **Love, Friendship and Intimacy: The Feminine Connection**

The central ideologies of intimatopia which connect love, friendship and intimacy are often difficult to discern in the sexually explicit text. Modern readers may be tempted to interpret the text only in terms of the sexual, ignoring the wide ranging representations of friendship and intimacy that surround it (indeed the next chapter provides a detailed analysis of just such a case). In all intimatopic texts, it is the connection, between love (sexual or ambiguous), and friendship that is established as being the cornerstone of any successfully intimate relationship between men. Reflecting these ideologies Mel Keegan’s texts depict their intimate heroes as both ‘bedmates and kin’ (*FOW* p.186). Keegan frequently describes sexual intimates in terms of brotherhood and kinship, cues which in modern western culture are more traditionally associated with nonsexual intimacy. By building her sexual relationships around cues which connote a wide range of sexual, nonsexual and ambiguous intimacies, Keegan is able to show her heroes evolving towards the intimatopic ideal; however, her two novels arrive at this ideal in distinctly different ways. Although each demonstrates a connection between love, friendship and intimacy, *An East Wind Blowing* develops all three during a single pivotal scene, while *Fortunes of War* begins with sexual love and only gradually adds friendship and intimacy as the text progresses.

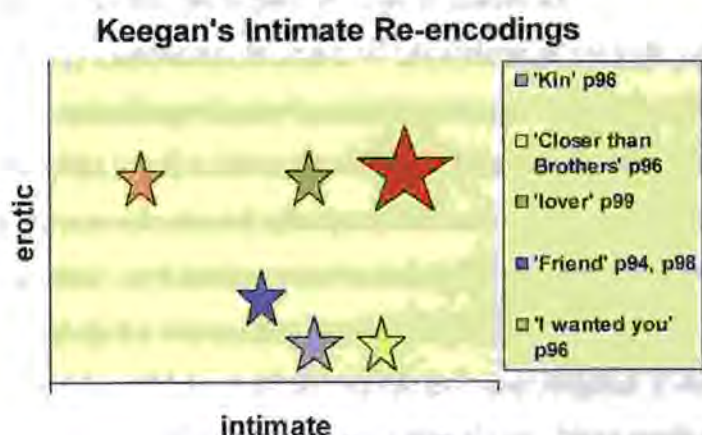
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<sup>13</sup> Frantzen, *Before the Closet*. p.294, p.69.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Homosexual Desire*.



The pivotal scene which brings together love, friendship and intimacy in *An East Wind Blowing* describes the first sexual encounter between the heroes (Ronan and Bryn). The two young men are thrown together by circumstance when a Saxon invasion destroys their homes and families. Although it is clear from the context that these two will eventually become lovers, the first tie that Keegan draws between them does not connote sexual love, instead it appropriates nonsexual love and intimacy from other cultural sources and depicts them as 'kindred' (p.87). Keegan then focuses on the image of friendship, a bond which cuts through Bryn and Ronan's initial struggle for dominance: 'Why should I want to kill you?' asks Ronan 'I'd sooner be your friend' (p.94). Thus friendship and kinship cues are both offered before Keegan adds erotic cues with her depiction of sexual love. It is two men who are 'closer than brothers could ever be' (p.96) who finally confess their mutual desire. Having thus achieved the intimatopic connection of love, friendship and intimacy, Keegan continues to use a range of intimate cues and, even after they become lovers, Bryn and Ronan call each other 'friend' (p.98). From this scene onward, Bryn and Ronan share an erotic relationship which is fully compatible with the ideologies of intimatopia: in their world love, friendship and intimacy are completely interconnected. Because the sexual intimatopic text risks all its eroticism being explained in sexual terms, Keegan is careful to construct her heroes' relationship in ways which emphasise other kinds of love and intimacy. It is possible to represent her text's connection of sexual love to wider themes of friendship and intimacy by using the chart I have developed for considering intimatopic re-encodings. In this case I have positioned coloured stars to represent the intimacy and eroticism suggested by the individual cues offered in this pivotal scene, many of which do not in isolation connote eroticism. The large red star represents the cumulative effect of all the cues which make up the scene, bringing together its range of erotic and intimate cues.

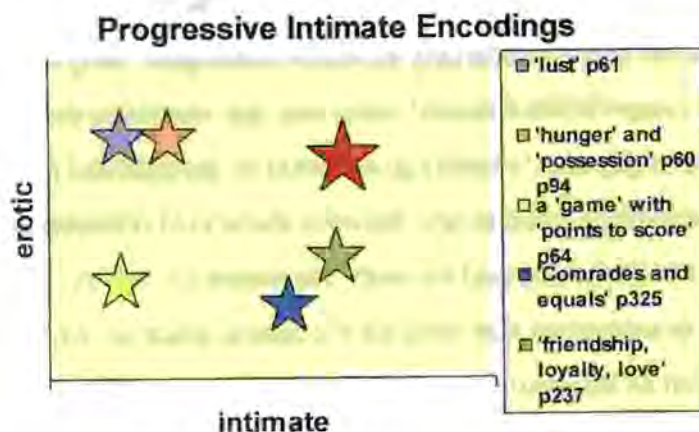


It can be seen that this pivotal scene works to situate the relationship in the position typical of intimatopic encodings, towards the top right hand corner of the chart.

*Fortunes of War* takes a different route to the same end point which is only reached much later in the text. In this novel love, friendship and intimacy do not develop together in a single scene. Instead, sexual love is established long before it is connected with friendship and intimacy. Channon and Robin, heroes of *Fortunes of War*, are initially drawn together by their mutual 'lust' (p.61) and 'hunger'; this purely sexual love is a 'game' with 'points to score' and 'prizes to be won' (p.64). At this point the text does not seem particularly intimatopic: there is no reciprocity or mutuality as Robin thinks of 'his possession' by Channon (p.60). However, as the text evolves, Robin and Channon's relationship becomes increasingly intimatopic as Keegan adds cues associated with an increasingly wide range of loves, friendships and intimacies. Robin and Channon eventually become 'comrades and equals' (p.325), soldiers who fight shoulder to shoulder (p.338) and intimate companions who share 'the same thoughts' (p.339 and p.347). By the end of the novel the two men share an intimate relationship based upon 'friendship, loyalty [and] love' (p.237). By using a variety of intimate cues, which do not all have erotic connotations, Keegan weaves friendship, loyalty, comradeship and love into the erotic ideal characteristic of intimatopia. Using the chart it is possible to see that although the progressive encoding of this text moves in an unfamiliar direction, from the sexual towards the intimate, its final integration works towards the typically intimatopic position



at the top right hand corner of the chart. Again the coloured stars represent isolated cues and the large red star represents the final position of *Fortunes of War*, showing how, despite the different route it takes to get there, its ideologies are strikingly similar to those of *An East Wind Blowing*.



Both *Fortunes of War* and *An East Wind Blowing* are typical of intimatopic texts in positing a potentially fluid connection between love, friendship and intimacy. As I have hinted on p.73 this seems to be an ideological framework more common amongst women than men,<sup>15</sup> and one which is in direct opposition to hegemonic ideologies which, as I have mentioned several times already, tend towards attempting to separate sexual love from friendship and intimacy. When Vicki Bertram asks if friendship in modern western culture can 'include those relationships that also have a sexual intimacy' she is forced to answer 'conventionally[...] "no."<sup>16</sup> More common in our culture is Leo Bersani's ideological perspective, which like Kopelson's, admits 'the possibility of friendship only when there is erotic disinterest'<sup>17</sup> The contrasting inclusive ideologies which can be found within intimatopic texts are a recurring feature of women's theoretical as well as fictional work. Ruth Symes's introduction to *Celebrating Women's Friendship* classifies both 'best friends' and 'lesbian

<sup>15</sup> Although I do not find a continuum model useful for interpreting ambiguous sources or texts, it is none the less clear that intimatopic ideologies commonly suggest a continuum between love and friendship.

<sup>16</sup> Vicki Bertram, 'Problems with (Girl)Friends? Contemporary Women Poets and Tensions in Female Friendship', in *Celebrating Women's Friendship: Past Present and Future*, ed. by Ruth A. Symes, Ann Kaloski and Heloise Brown (York: Raw Nerve Books, 1999), pp.181-214 (p.181).

<sup>17</sup> Mark Blasius, 'Contemporary Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Theories and Their Politics', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (1998), 642-674 (p.651).

couples' under the term 'friendship',<sup>18</sup> and a similarly inclusive stance is suggested by Rich's influential image of the 'lesbian continuum' which includes 'passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers[...]' and 'community'.<sup>19</sup> Although I have distinguished Sedgwick's theoretical stance from that of intimatopia (p.101), her imagination, when not embedded in critical practice, suggests an investment in similarly inclusive ideologies. Sedgwick's confessional essay 'White Glasses' states that she wanted to make 'interventions into the scene of gay men's bonding, community, thought and politics'.<sup>20</sup> Clearly she is imagining a fluid connection between the sexual relationships suggested by 'gay' and the friendship and intimacy suggested by 'community' and 'bonding'. It is interesting that Sedgwick's critical practice, whilst apparently beginning from an intimatopic perspective and proposing a potential continuum between the sexual and the homosocial, is too concerned with the realization of sex and sexuality to be considered intimatopic (p.101). Perhaps this gap between conception and practice is the result of a conscious re-encoding of literary and cultural interpretations to suit the perceived ideological expectations of different interpretive communities. Despite the undoubted prevalence of intimatopic elements across a breadth of women's professional work, it cannot be assumed that the intimatopic perspective reflects *only* women's concerns. There are of course men who are also drawing connections between sexual love, friendship and intimacy.<sup>21</sup> This caveat explains why, despite the prevalence of feminine ideologies in Keegan's novels, her male guise remains convincing to the majority of readers. The fact that a number of men are interested in exploring intimatopic ideologies does not undermine the fact that a fluid connection between friendship and erotic love is an ideological concern more common amongst women, whose

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<sup>18</sup> Ruth A. Symes, Ann Kaloski and Heloise Brown, 'Introduction', in *Celebrating Women's Friendship*, pp.1-20 (p.2).

<sup>19</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p.27.

<sup>20</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.254.

<sup>21</sup> One such man, Allen J Frantzen, whose sentiments in 1998 appear to parallel those of Rich in 1987 and Keegan in the 1990s, feels that 'life is more interesting, pleasurable, and meaningful if its erotic potential can be expanded across a spectrum that includes but is not restricted to the sexual'. Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, p.292.

predisposition, evolutionary biologist Symons claims, is tuned towards the idea that 'a social relationship' should form 'the basis for a sexual relationship'.<sup>22</sup>

Any individual who interprets, decodes or re-encodes intimacy between men must engage with the cultural faultline between the intimate and the sexual. For many men this faultline is extremely troubling and their attempts to negotiate it are characterised by contradiction and confusion. John Boswell, in writing about the concept of friendship for the modern homosexual male, claims 'gay people will only consider it one of two distinct possibilities'.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, reflecting the uncertainty surrounding intimate and sexual behaviour, this could have two possible meanings: it could mean that friendship and sexual love are both 'distinctly' likely, or, it could mean that they are two 'distinctly' separate possibilities. The statement fails to make it clear whether he believes that gay men are able to embrace both possibilities simultaneously, or that they face a choice between the two. Boswell is thus unable to reconcile the sexual / intimate faultline and his interpretations reflect his uncertainty over where the boundaries, if any, lie. Another male commentator, Dennis Altman, insists that male friendship and sexual love are incompatible in real life because, he feels, the intimacy of male bonding necessitates 'the repression of homosexuality'.<sup>24</sup> Although appearing to separate intimate and sexual bonds, Altman's focus on 'repression', implies his uneasiness over how distinct intimacy and sexual love really are. Similarly male literary critic Leslie Fiedler writes of American culture that 'the fact of homosexual passion contradicts a national myth of masculine love'.<sup>25</sup> Fiedler too appears to present 'love' and 'sexual passion' as contradictory and yet his terms suggest that masculine love is just a 'myth' and is, in fact, the self same thing as 'homosexual desire'. These images, all from male commentators, attempt to negotiate the faultline between the intimate and the sexual by drawing a theoretical demarcation line between the two. However

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<sup>22</sup> Donald Symons, *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.52.

<sup>23</sup> Boswell, *The Marriage of Likeness*, p. xxvii.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.52.

<sup>25</sup> Fiedler, *An End to Innocence*, p.143.



their theories fail in practice and they all reproduce the ‘unresolved ideological complications’ that Sinfield claims are characteristic cultural faultlines.<sup>26</sup>

By contrast, Keegan and other intimatopic writers are negotiating the faultline very differently; even when writing ambiguous texts they do not try to draw a line between intimate and erotic love, instead, as I have claimed about both Renault and Barker, intimacy and eroticism are made to unite across the imperfectly drawn boundaries which separate them. David Van Leer has highlighted how such a uniting perspective can be criticised for suggesting that all intimate love is sexual at root.<sup>27</sup> However ambiguous intimatopic texts frustrate such a claim and sexual intimatopic texts reverse the assumption that all intimacy must really be about sexuality and imply instead that all successful sexual relationships are ‘really’ about intimacy. As I have already mentioned briefly, and as discussed in more detail below, intimatopia’s ideologies displace the sexual as the single defining principle of close relationships, expanding it through a wide range of images connoting love, both sexual and ambiguous, friendship and intimacy. Salmon and Symons claim that a connection between love and friendship, such as that described by Montaigne in 1575 where ‘bodies and souls could share in friendship,’ has no place in modern heterosexual, patriarchal ideologies.<sup>28</sup> This is perhaps so, but ‘heterosexual patriarchal ideologies’ are not the only ideologies to circulate in our culture. And deriving from a different interpretive community Keegan’s sexual texts, with their intimatopic focus on the connections between sexual love, friendship and intimacy amply demonstrate how to make love with bodies *and* souls.

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.4. For more examples of male negotiations of this faultline in the context of ambiguity see p.103.

<sup>27</sup> David Van Leer, *The Queening of America: Gay Culture in Straight Society* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.55.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons, *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001), p.95.

## Making Love in Intimatopia: Sexual Ideologies

### Moderated Eroticism

Perhaps unexpected in the sexual text, but already apparent from Renault's re-encodings, ideologies of moderated eroticism reject the sexual as the defining principle of close relationships, replacing it with intimacy and insisting that intimacy is ultimately of more import than the erotic or sexual bonds which may engender it. In *An East Wind Blowing* this ideological perspective is particularly evident in the scene, already discussed, in which Bryn and Ronan first share their love. Here eroticism is so moderated that Keegan depicts both men as 'too exhausted to move'; so tired in fact that 'physical desire was impossible' (p.97). Because of this the text must find other ways for the characters to interact, and is able to centralise intimate rather than sexual erotics as the two men lie 'pressed together' sharing 'closeness' and 'warmth' (p.97). The image suggested is particularly reminiscent of Mary Renault's re-encoding of Alexander as sexually 'warm not hot' (TPB p.250). By highlighting intimacy in this way Keegan is able to ensure that, despite some graphically sexual passages, Bryn and Ronan's love remains based around the intimacy they share, positioning their relationship as typically intimatopic.

In the case of *Fortunes of War*, in which intimate and sexual bonds are not developed together in a single scene, eroticism becomes increasingly moderated as the text moves towards intimacy. Thus the focus of the relationship moves away from the sexual as this is gradually transcended by the intimate. Channon and Robin's sexual relationship begins, on both their parts, with 'lust' (p.61) and if 'love' is characterised rather negatively at this stage as 'the velvet trap' (p.66), it is only because it has not yet been strengthened by the development of intimacy. As intimacy develops it begins to displace the sexual as the central defining principle of love, for after a time 'it was not Robin's body Channon wanted[...]. It was his heart' (p.71). As in *An East Wind Blowing*, once the two men have integrated intimacy into their relationship, the text offers us a passage describing moderated eroticism designed to show how their relationship

now transcends the purely sexual.<sup>29</sup> Channon has been ill, and Robin meets his flirtatious advances with the admonition, 'you're in no condition to be a lover to me.' When Channon claims, 'I shall be soon. Be patient[...]. Allow me time' Robin replies, 'as long as you need' (p.282). Though sexual erotics are impossible, intimate erotics are not curtailed for 'Robin stroked him intimately' and 'embraced him gladly' (p.282). Under ideologies of moderated eroticism physical gestures become expressive of intimacy rather than sexual desire or 'lust'.

Unlike Barker's and Hill's novels, where moderated eroticism is used to create and maintain ambiguity, Keegan's novels fully realise the sexual element but use moderated eroticism to centralise intimacy: to show how 'love' may end up 'eclipsing lust' (*EWB* p.176). The moderation of 'lust' is necessary to Keegan's sexual texts because ultimately, just as in Renault's novels (p.72), the point of sex becomes the intimacy that it engenders. In *An East Wind blowing*, where intimacy is established early in the text, it was during sexual intercourse that Bryn most 'keenly felt his kinship with Ronan' (p.121) and thus 'each lovemaking brought them closer' (p.121). Ronan and Bryn's sexual love becomes part of the wider intimacy they share and is encoded as an expression of that intimacy: '[Ronan] pressed closer, as if he could get into Bryn's skin and share it with him.' (p.197). In *Fortunes of War* the sex Robin and Channon share, once intimacy has been established, is similarly encoded as being an expression of the intimacy it engenders, for when their heads 'lay on the same pillow' after making love Robin 'seemed to read [Channon's] thoughts' (p.339). In both these images sex engages the body and the soul but it is the mental, rather than the physical, that facilitates the intimacy that ultimately unites Keegan's heroes.

Sex that does not engender intimacy, and will never be transcended by it, is rejected, as it is by Mary Renault (p.72), without question. In *An East Wind Blowing* when Bryn makes a pass at Ronan before circumstances have made them 'kin', Ronan replies 'not tonight Bryn,' and adds to himself, reflecting Keegan's intimatopic ideologies, 'and not any night, not without caring and

<sup>29</sup> There are in fact several examples of this kind of scene within *Fortunes of War* see for instance p.191 onwards and p.335 onwards.



affection.’(p.50). The crucial difference thus turns upon the emotions of ‘caring’ and ‘affection’ which both characterise the love, friendship and intimacy of intimatopia and moderate its sexual climate. Keegan’s *Fortunes of War* also devalues sex that does not engender intimacy, using Robin as a mouthpiece for her intimatopic perspective, Keegan suggests that if it is ‘not done with love’, ‘being fucked’ is hateful (p.206). Channon also reflects Keegan’s commitment to intimatopic ideologies when, appearing oblivious to the possibility of sex without intimacy, he says of an attractive young man ‘I am not in love with him. Why should I desire him?’ (p.291). In Keegan’s intimatopic world the sexual and erotic are only of value when they engender intimacy.

Keegan’s intimatopic perspective is made particularly explicit through her use of hurt/comfort scenes. I have already discussed Pat Barker’s use of this structure to support ideologies of moderated eroticism (p.95), and although Keegan’s texts present it in a different context, she also uses hurt/comfort to explore moderated eroticism. Though at first it may seem that a sexual, rather than ambiguous, text would obviate the need for a structure which legitimates intimacy between its male protagonists, the appearance of hurt/comfort in the sexual text suggests that here too the author is looking for ways to represent intimacy without sexual denotation. In *An East Wind Blowing* Bryn and Ronan’s battle with the invading Saxons provides the context for hurt/comfort when Bryn is stabbed and the wound healed with hot irons. The hurt that Bryn receives leaves him feeble and ‘dizzy’ (p.244) dependant on Ronan who must provide the intimate services of personal dresser and physical supporter. In *Fortunes of War* it is Channon who suffers when he catches the ‘yellow jack’ fever which renders him equally dependant on Robin, upon whom he must ‘lean heavily’ as he totters to their shelter (p.268). These depictions of dependency and ‘comfort’ are, in both novels, as they are in Barker’s ambiguous texts, laced with eroticism. The first thing that Channon does upon regaining consciousness is to ‘press his lips to one plum coloured nipple’ of Robin’s (*FWO* p.269). Likewise although still confined to bed, Bryn ‘kissed’ Ronan ‘deeply, tongues entwined’(*EWB* p.252). I established in the chapter on Pat Barker how her ambiguous texts combined social and intimate cues with erotic ones and Keegan’s texts, though sexual, do just the same. Where an intimatopic relationship is encoded in sexual terms there

are numerous intimate and social cues such as kinship which parallel the obvious erotic ones. Where the same relationship is encoded in socially intimate terms, such as when an injury has made sexual interaction impossible, the text is laced with erotic cues, in either context the two are made to work in tandem just as they are in the ambiguous text. Keegan's connection of eroticism with hurt/comfort forms part of her ideological interest in moderated eroticism largely because it demonstrates that the erotic attraction between the two heroes transcends the physical and allows intimacy to be expressed when the sexual is impossible or even undesirable. Hurt/comfort allows Keegan to highlight how the sexual has become secondary to the intimacy it has engendered, for although Bryn is rendered temporality impotent by his injuries, warning Ronan 'I shan't be a lover to you just yet' (*EWB* p.268), Keegan suggests this barely matters, for Ronan and Bryn are 'somehow kindred' (*EWB* p.268). Intimacy, the text implies, will endure in situations where the more physical aspects of a sexual relationship would wither and die; as Keegan suggests in *Fortunes of War*, when 'lust [is] spent love endure[s]' (p.155). This sentiment can be found echoed in many of the intimatopic texts I have already considered; Mary Renault's *Bagoas* claims, that when 'desire [has] faded [...] love [is] there' (*TPB* p.150) and Barker's male heroes find more solace in the intimacy they share with one another than in any of the transient sexual relationships they experience. The idea that intimacy lasts where the physical does not, dates back at least as far as Plato, whose dialogues put the emphasis of long-term relationships on friendship rather than sexual attraction and hurt/comfort provides the modern writer with an excellent way of illustrating this ideological perspective.

Intimatopia's emphasis on moderated eroticism, love and intimacy might suggest that the sex in intimatopia is always a sweet and gentle affair, however this is far from the case. Indeed, because it initially seems so discordant with the intimatopic perspective, I'd like to devote some attention specifically to the depiction of violent sex. Violent sex and/or almost rape<sup>30</sup> is not a particularly common feature of intimatopic texts, however it occurs often enough to deserve

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<sup>30</sup> I term it 'almost rape' because although some intimatopic texts do have what appear to be full rape scenes, the plot usually undermines any simplistic categorisation. For instance the rapist might be temporality insane or the 'victim' have given his consent in some way.

investigation and *Fortunes of War* provides us with a good opportunity to follow this through. This novel includes both a description of seemingly violent sex and, in contrast to this, an almost rape scene which is designed as an extreme example of the brutality of sex without intimacy. In the almost rape scene the reciprocal face-to-face communication typical of intimatopia breaks down and Channon wonders why Robin seems to 'hate' him (p.177). Unable to understand Robin's apparent anger, Channon 'threw Robin onto the divan and tore his clothes, in that moment fully intending buggery. Rape.' (p.179) The surrounding images of 'savage hands', 'pain', 'nausea', 'mockery and provocation' (p.177/178) do not offer a single intimate cue and indeed even the erotic cues offered are limited to those associated with the sexual nature of 'buggery'. In contrast to other explicit scenes which also present the image of one man being 'fucked forcibly beneath' another, but which include images of 'kissing', 'delight' and 'belonging' (p.254/255), this scene does not appear to be encoded as part of the novel's erotic content. Instead, it provides a contrast to scenes which are both erotic and intimate and demonstrates how intimate communication is necessary to a stable erotic relationship, exploring the danger of unmoderated eroticism. This scene also allows Keegan to show how intimacy can overcome misunderstandings and restore love in place of violence. Luckily for Robin, he passed out from an injury he sustained in an earlier fight just as Channon was about to rape him and Channon decides to reconsider his actions. Through Robin's delirious mutterings which follow, face-to-face communication is, all be it inadvertently, restored. Channon understands that Robin does love him and, reproaching himself for his violence, asks Robin for 'the truth' (p.180).

*Fortunes of War* also contains scenes which, in contrast to the almost rape scene, demonstrate how violence may be reconfigured in the context of intimacy. In a sex scene which follows the almost rape scene by several chapters it is Robin who strips Channon and forces him towards the bed. In this case however face-to-face communication remains and when Channon asks what he is being 'punished' for Robin reassures him that he 'wouldn't hurt' him 'least of all in bed' (p.254). Redirecting the reader along intimate lines, Robin's reply allows Keegan to re-encode violence as intimacy; Robin does not intend rape, but he does intend to leave his 'mark' on Channon (p.250). This image hints at the

reason why scenes like this occur in intimatopic texts; within the context of intimacy violent cues can be read as intimate. Indeed, in this scene violence is re-encoded as possessiveness, as Robin resolves that Channon will 'know he belonged' (p.254). This re-encoding of violence continues throughout the following sex scene which, with its images of 'perfunctory gentleness' and the 'relentless lunge' that 'rammed without respite' with 'bewildering power' (p.254) is not obviously encoded as one of intimacy. However the surrounding context makes it clear that in this case violent cues, similar to those offered by the almost rape scene, are being made to facilitate intimacy. Through Robin's seemingly violent act Channon is able to share, to 'relinquish', to give 'his pleasure, pain' and 'even the moment's subjugation' (p.254). As if echoing the connotations of sharing the scene becomes very confused and it is increasingly difficult to establish who does what to whom as the two heroes share their mutual 'passion' (p.254). When erotic cues are embedded in an intimate context, even apparently violent sex can be re-encoded as being about intimacy and as such is made to serve many of intimatopia's ideological commitments, including the possessiveness and reciprocity seen here. Channon makes it quite clear that he knows this act is about 'love' rather than 'sex' and his comment, which precedes this scene, guides the reader towards interpreting it along the lines Keegan intended: 'I've been fucked many times, but never with love, [...] It if [*sic*] hurt a little, so be it' (p.213). Here the moderation of lust by love allows violent instincts to be redirected towards intimacy.

These two scenes, one of violence which almost manifests itself as rape, and one of violence which is made to serve intimacy, stand in complete contrast to one another. In many ways the later, passionate, scene re-encodes the earlier one, representing violence and passion within a context where they can become part of intimatopia's ideological landscape.<sup>31</sup> The two scenes can be compared on the chart showing how the passionate scene adds intimacy to the violence of the almost rape scene, bringing it in line with the ideals of intimatopia. Here the

<sup>31</sup> Tania Modleski suggests that this kind of re-encoding is also a common feature of romantopia in which she claims, the heroes are all 'more or less brutal, and it is a function of the novels to explain such brutality in a lover' as 'a manifestation not of contempt but of love'. However in romantopia it is the heroine who must learn to interpret violence as a manifestation of love, rather than the hero who learns that intimacy is better than true violence. Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge 1990), p.41.



white star represents the almost rape scene, in which a limited number of erotic cues exist around sexual connotation but which contains virtually no intimate cues. The red star represents the violent but passionate scene, which, positioned towards the upper right hand corner of the chart, is typical of intimatopic re-encodings where intimacy and eroticism combine.

Keegan's Re-encoding of Violence



### Reciprocity in Body and Mind

Part of the difference between the two scenes discussed above can be connected to intimatopia's ideological investment in reciprocal relationships that traverse the mental and the physical plane; rape is not reciprocal and the joining it describes is limited to physical terms. By contrast, passionate, even violent, sex may be both reciprocal and join the partners on a mental as well as physical level. Both *Fortunes of War* and *An East Wind Blowing* are insistent about the achievement and centrality of reciprocity within any relationship that operates under the intimatopic ideal. Keegan is careful to specify the reciprocal respect that exists between each male couple; Ronan says he will be Bryn's friend and lover but will 'not call [him] master' (p.95) in much the same vein as Robin insists that though he will be Channon's 'comrade' and '*amante*,' he will not be his 'catamite' (*FOW* p.309). Within the sexual intimatopic text the sex act itself becomes part of the text's interest in reciprocity. In many cases this requires some difficult negotiation on the part of the writer, for penetrative sex is, in modern patriarchal culture, replete with hierarchal assumptions and power differentials. One of the ways in which Keegan attempts to overcome this is to depict relationships in which the partners take both sexual roles in turn,

illustrating reciprocal ideologies in which men need 'to take as well as to give', (*FW* p.233). By reversing the more common phraseology of 'give and take' Keegan emphasises the importance of this short quotation within the text. Within Keegan's ideological framework it is only when Bryn has been penetrated by Ronan, as Ronan has been penetrated by Bryn, that they will 'properly be lovers' and 'equals' (*EWB* p.118). However, no manoeuvre that the text can make will overcome the gendered assumptions underlying our culture's representation of penetration and sex. Nonetheless, in attempting to unsettle the usual binaries intimatopic texts again run counter to hegemonic ideologies. Here the ideologies of intimatopia challenge heteronormative assumptions, although, in this case, they are also at odds with 'queer' ideologies expressed within the gay male community to whom this text is marketed. Christopher Kendal claims that, although the majority of gay men 'have the option of being both top and bottom, the fact remains that the top represents the idealised masculine norm'.<sup>32</sup> Keegan is clearly questioning any such assumption, for her gender blending heroes (see p.152 below) are easily able to enjoy both roles without questioning their masculine status. Perhaps intimatopia is a fantasy that markets well in the gay community, despite its contrasting ideologies, because it represents a world in which men really can experience both sexual roles. Intimatopic texts also deal with the inevitable inequality implied by penetrative sex by their focus on the mental reciprocity which underlies the physical act. In Keegan's fictional world, as lovers share their bodies they also share 'thoughts' (*FW* p.347) and feel their own desires 'mirrored' in the other (*EWB* p.99). All these images are evocative of the 'shared souls' paradigm that so drew Renault to Plato. The image of unity offered is one which counterbalances connotations of inequality associated with various sex acts: the intimatopic text suggests that, if reciprocity exists on a mental plane, then each partner experiences the other's dominance or subjugation in equal measure.

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher N. Kendall, 'Educating Gay Male Youth: Since When is Pornography a Path towards Self- Respect?', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47 (2004), 83-128 (p.105).



## Face-to-Face Communication

The reciprocal face-to-face communication which is such a distinctive feature of ambiguous intimatopias is equally common in the erotic landscape of sexual intimatopias. Within both *An East Wind Blowing* and *Fortunes of War* Keegan's descriptions of sexual passion are interrupted by, or followed by, emotional disclosures: 'I love you' (*EWB* p.123), 'I will surely die without you' (*EWB* p.176), 'I love you more now than years ago' (*FW* p.212). In this way the sex, in sexually graphic intimatopias is, once again, made to serve the genres' wider ideological concerns. The face-to-face communication which characterises sexual interaction in intimatopia is clearly at odds with the usual construction of homoerotic pornography by men which, as one gay man interviewed by Todd Morrison claimed, avoided intimacy because it was 'associated with the female role'.<sup>33</sup> According to Morrison's interviewees, avoiding this feminine intimacy means avoiding 'anything post-coital'<sup>34</sup> such as the confessions of love which are rife in Keegan's novels. The sexual ideologies of Keegan's novels are also at odds with what Sheila Jeffries sees as a trend in lesbian thinking during the 1990s in which intimacy was considered detrimental to a good sex life because it dissolved the barriers central to physical desire.<sup>35</sup> Although, as far as I am aware, Keegan does not have connections to the lesbian community Jeffries discusses, this ideological perspective is one which is relatively common amongst heterosexual as well as gay communities of both men and women. Wherever it is found this kind of thinking is the antithesis of Keegan's intimatopic view of sex in which the intimacy induced by face-to-face communication will always enhance erotic ties, making them deeper, stronger and even more erotic.

Keegan uses scenes of hurt/comfort, which she also uses in the representation of moderated eroticism, to facilitate her depiction of face-to-face communication. Ann T. Dickinson notes that, as used in amateur fan fiction, hurt/comfort 'serves to break down inhibitions about admitting and revealing

<sup>33</sup> Todd G. Morrison, "He was Treating me like Trash, and I was loving it..." Perspectives on Gay Male Pornography", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47 ( 2004), 167-183 (p.177).

<sup>34</sup> Morrison, 'He was Treating me like Trash', p.177

<sup>35</sup> Sheila Jeffries, *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist perspective on the Lesbian sexual Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1994).

intense emotions',<sup>36</sup> and this is exactly how it functions in many professionally published texts too. The vulnerability and dependency afforded by hurt/comfort is particularly apposite to face-to-face communication and is used to these ends by sexual and ambiguous texts alike. In *An East Wind Blowing*, as Bryn lies in Ronan's arms, recuperating after having been injured killing an enemy Saxon, Ronan is able to ask him 'How did it happen? What did you feel?' Bryn, his inhibitions lowered by his suffering, is able to admit that he felt 'fear[...]anger[...]strange and terrible' emotions, and to confess that he did not feel the 'glory' in murder that he expected (*EWB* p.252). In *Fortunes of War* when Robin nurses Channon back from his fever he asks him 'how do you feel?' and Channon, a character who is often determined to prove his masculine 'worth' (p.226), is able to admit to feeling 'weak, dizzy and tired' (p.269). In *Intimatopia* communication is often afforded by suffering; fever and delirium provide the catalysts which break down inhibitions and induce face-to-face communication. Channon, lying fevered, 'cried out to' Robin (*FOW* p.198) and Robin himself suffering a fever calls out to Channon, 'Dermot! Ah...Dermot', 'love, ah, love, come back to me.' (*FOW* p.179). This connection between suffering and intimate communication is perhaps why *intimatopia's* amateur manifestation in slash fiction is often ridiculed for its seemingly melodramatic approach, in which, as Joanna Russ puts it, 'somebody is always bleeding or feverish or concussed or mutilated or amnesic or what-have-you.'<sup>37</sup> Melodrama it may be, but more importantly these elements of suffering are all tools which can be used to release inhibitions and facilitate communication. In a situation where these 'melodramatic' images cannot be imported wholesale from a historical source such as the trenches of the First World War the *intimatopic* text supplies its own.

### Intimate Exclusivity

It probably goes without saying that the intense relationships depicted in Keegan's texts are exclusive to the individuals who experience them, and in this

<sup>36</sup> Ann T. Dickenson, 'The Psychology of the Kirk/Spock Relationship' (no date or publisher) p.95. This article was given to me as a photo-copied cutting from an early fanzine, I do not know the source, but I would date it at approximately 1981.

<sup>37</sup> Joanna Russ, *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts: Feminist Essays* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1985), p.82

Keegan's sexual world is consistent with the intimatopic focus on privatising the homosocial experience. Ronan and Bryn repeat to one another: 'I shall bed with no others, nor kiss them, till we are separated by death or we farewell each other from choice' (*EWB* p.123). Interestingly this is one of the closest parallels to the marriage ceremony I have seen offered in a professionally published intimatopic text. Though less overtly, *Fortunes of War* also encodes its heroes' relationship as unique in terms of its exclusivity and intimacy. Until he meets Robin, Channon had 'rarely felt such possessiveness' and is surprised to find that the idea of Robin 'in the arms of another, [...] pained him' (p.66). Contrasting the intimacy he finds in his exclusive relationship with Channon, to his transient experience of heterosexual marriage, Robin confesses how he 'had starved for the comfort of intimacy' (p.210) in the arms of the woman he married when he thought Channon dead. Both of Keegan's texts enhance the exclusivity of the intimacy they depict by their representation of their heroes as outcasts: their intimate relationships form a striking contrast to their exclusion from the wider world. In *Fortunes of War* Robin has a poor home life with his father who not only beats him but, more importantly, excludes him from all intimacy. Channon too is a social outcast for 'the *tuatha* that should have been his birthright was snatched away, late one bloody summer afternoon not long before his fifteenth birthday' (*FWO* p.29). Together they find their home through the privatisation of the homosocial experience which facilitates their mutual intimacy; as Robin says, 'I'd sooner be with you in a hut than alone in a palace' (*FWO* p.347). In *An East Wind Blowing* Bryn, heir to the chieftain, is denied his inheritance when his whole family is destroyed by Saxon invaders leaving him 'the last of Gruffydd's blood' (p.85). Ronan has always been somehow different for even his mother felt he 'was like no other boy she knew' (*EWB* p.12). Then, in the same invasion that wiped out Bryn's family, he too loses everything: 'My own family is dead, and all my village. [...] I have nothing left to lose' (*EWB* p.83). Again the two young men find belonging in the homosocial unity they share and the novel concludes as Robin says to Bryn 'my place is here, with you' (*EWB* p.252). The use of the image of an outcast is a particularly common feature of intimatopic texts.

Consider the position of Bagoas (a slave and eunuch), Alexander (isolated by his superior status), Sassoon (refusing to support the war), Rivers (too old to fight) and Hilliard (estranged by his introverted nature). In these texts social isolation

stands in dramatic contrast to the heroes' gradual acceptance into an exclusive bond of interpersonal intimacy.

### Different Readers, Different Intimacies

Although I have recently encountered several casual readers who did not realise Pat Barker was a female writer, Mel Keegan is the only writer considered in this thesis who deliberately uses an ambiguous name to conceal her female identity. Both Gay Men's Press and Keegan's official website at [www.melkeegan.com](http://www.melkeegan.com) are consistent in their references to Keegan as 'he' and Keegan's female identity appears to be a secret in her professional world. It is only the insider knowledge I have gained from *Star Trek* fandom which enables me to make the connection between Mel Keegan and a woman who writes slash fan fiction based on the British television series *The Professionals* as 'Jane', 'JJ Adamson', or 'Kathy Keegan'.<sup>38</sup> Keegan, whose real name I believe to be Jennifer Downes, is well known amongst slash fans for her successful professional marketing of the slash fiction she wrote under various pseudonyms.<sup>39</sup> To avoid the confusion which potentially arises from such an array of pen names I shall continue to refer to this writer as Mel Keegan, whichever persona she is appearing as. Keegan's case raises several critical issues: of most importance in this context is her successful masquerade as a male writer. Does Keegan's, apparently unquestioned, status as a male writer undermine the category of women's writing? That Keegan's texts fit into the established canon of male writing for male readers produced by Gay Men's Press suggests that the ideologies associated with intimatopic texts are not so universally feminine that they cannot, with the right marketing, be palatable to

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<sup>38</sup> This personal communication from a slash writer explains it thus: 'Jane is the name that Jennifer Downes uses for her fanfic. She assumed the name Mel Keegan for her professionally published work. It is funny to read reviews of her work on Amazon when people assume the author is a gay man! Jennifer is the wife of David Downes, who is the son of the late Gerry Downes, who wrote *Alternative: The Epilog to Orion*, which was the first stand alone K/S zine.' (personal communication 8 April 2005)

<sup>39</sup> It is just possible that Keegan is a man who has fooled the fan fiction community into believing him a woman, however the personal details known about Jennifer Downes are all consistent with a female gender, whereas those given about Keegan are vague. I cannot however claim with 100% certainty anything about Keegan's biological sex. Interestingly, on her web pages which market re-prints of her mother-in-law's fanzines, Jennifer claims that 'the "waffle" in any zine or [fannish] website is usually my only real opportunity to speak with my own voice and to say what I hope and feel' on line <<http://www.leisuresoft.net/stardate/home.htm>>.



men. Keegan's successful masquerade as a male writer thus significantly problematises any assumption that there is a recognisable and separate field of women's writing. Although it is clear by this stage that intimatopia forms a distinct genre of writing, the majority of which is written by women, the production of an intimatopic text is clearly not sufficient to unmask its author as female.

Keegan's masquerade also raises issues of authenticity and trust and it must be acknowledged that Keegan's attempt to appear as a man in a man's world may be considered offensive from various perspectives. From a queer perspective, Keegan can never be more than the 'ethnographer' Van Leer characterises Sedgwick as<sup>40</sup> and as Monica B Pearl asks, 'what right does a straight woman have to be telling us what it means to be queer'?<sup>41</sup> This seems a reasonable question in light of the feeling that women have little in common with gay men from either the perspective of biology or cultural positioning.<sup>42</sup> For both Pearl and Van Leer, the perceived problem results from the gap between the author's actual experiences and the those implied by her text. This same problem appears to be at the root of feminist concerns over women who, in writing as men, seem to deny their own femininity and feminine concerns. Feminist writer Joanna Russ characterises a woman who writes as a man as someone who 'falsifies herself and much of her own experience', a woman who 'ignores the whole experience of the female culture'.<sup>43</sup> Russ' concern once again centres around the perceived gap between the authorial persona and textual representation. The feminist commentator Cora Kaplan offers an alternative perspective in which this gap may become a source of power; she suggests that women writers who are appropriating homosocial and patriarchal spaces are securing 'a privileged space where the most disruptive female fantasy can be

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<sup>40</sup> Van Leer, *The Queening of America*, p.130.

<sup>41</sup> Monica B. Pearl, 'Eve Sedgwick's Melancholic "White Glasses"', *Textual Practice*, 17 (2003), 61-80 (p.62). I cannot of course be sure that Keegan is 'straight' but as Jennifer, she speaks of her recent heterosexual marriage.

<sup>42</sup> Salmon and Symons, *Warrior Lovers*, claim that 'women simply will not behave like gay men' p.51; Stephen Maddison, *Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters: Gender Dissent and Heterosocial Bonds in Gay Culture* (London: Macmillan, 2000) claims that cultural positioning makes women's desire for men legitimate, and men's desire for men perverse p.94.

<sup>43</sup> Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.85. It goes without saying that I disagree and this thesis hopefully suggests why. (see p.74)



“safely” indulged’.<sup>44</sup> Here the gap between the author and her text is represented as a ‘safe’ space, but Kaplan is unsure whether using this space is a subversive infiltration, or a retreat from the reality of more immediate feminist concerns.<sup>45</sup> That Keegan is apparently neither gay nor male, and yet her texts are marketed as if she were, may be problematic within both queer and feminist communities. However the concerns raised by Keegan’s masquerade are somewhat reconciled by the knowledge that her initial audience was neither queer nor male, but rather the, largely heterosexual, women of the slash fiction community. Seen from this perspective, Keegan’s textual ideologies and her authorial persona perfectly match those of her intended audience; seen as part of this interpretive community Keegan is simply a woman writing fiction for women.<sup>46</sup>

The majority, if not all, of Keegan’s professionally published texts have a counterpart in the world of slash fan fiction. Though not completely identical the slash fiction versions are extremely similar, broadly sharing the same plot and in many cases the same words. In every case I have considered, the slash fiction version was written first and is less well fleshed out. Although Keegan’s texts, even as published by Gay Men’s Press, are clearly intimatopic in nature, in the slash fiction versions the intimatopic vision is structured differently. It is Keegan’s depiction of gender blending heroes which seems most altered in her re-encoding of her slash fiction for a new, predominantly male, audience. In contrast to the freedom from gender stereotypes, which many fans feel characterise slash fiction as a genre ‘without preconceived ideas and expectations about gender roles’,<sup>47</sup> concerns about gender are clearly rife in the gay male community which tends to connect both intimacy and penetration to femininity. It is not surprising then that Keegan’s novels, when aimed at the gay community, show far less use of gender blending as a facilitation of intimacy than their slash fiction counterparts do. Keegan’s *Fortunes of War* began life as the slash fiction

<sup>44</sup> Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986) p.145

<sup>45</sup> Of course many reasons for Keegan’s choice to masquerade as a man may not be politically motivated at all. Instead it may be a purely pragmatic decision based on the economic necessity not to alienate the gay male readership that her texts are marketed towards.

<sup>46</sup> Not all slash fiction is intimatopic in nature but Keegan’s main fandom *The Professionals* is one of the most intimatopic fandoms in slash fandom today.

<sup>47</sup> Melinda Clark, ‘Slash Another View’, (1999). Essay on line  
<<http://www.wordsmiths.net/essays.htm>>.

zine *A Madrigal* which appropriated William Bodie and Raymond Doyle from the British television series *The Professionals*.<sup>48</sup> As is typical of slash fiction, *A Madrigal* begins from the friendship established on screen between Bodie and Doyle and re-encodes it into a sexual relationship. Both *A Madrigal* and *Fortunes of War* depict heroes whose gender blending qualities facilitate their intimate interactions on various levels, however that gender blending is decidedly more qualified in the professionally published text and the sexual relationship depicted in Keegan's *Fortunes of War* is decidedly more masculinised than that of *A Madrigal*. Since male writers like Neil Bartlett have been credited with creating heroes who function as both 'perfectly domesticated heroine and [...] rebellious, self-affirmative hero',<sup>49</sup> there is no reason to assume that gender integration is particularly remarkable in gay male fiction. However these writers' reasons for depicting gender integrative characters, from 'gay liberation'<sup>50</sup> to a desire to claim 'a position on the margins',<sup>51</sup> may differ from those of female intimatopic writers. Perhaps these differences, as well as Keegan's awareness of the concern over gender roles which can be part of the gay community, account for the re-encodings which separate *Fortunes of War* from its source *A Madrigal*.

The scene in *Fortunes of War*, in which Channon and Robin share what might be considered violent sex, is a direct re-encoding of *A Madrigal*, a re-encoding which adds masculine signifiers and reduces intimacy. Although the possessive, phrase 'you are mine'<sup>52</sup>, which appears to reflect 'aggressive' and

<sup>48</sup> In an amusing in joke, which forms the only overt, if extremely subtle, connection I can find to *The Professionals* in *Fortunes of War*, on p.198 Channon suggests that Robin disguise himself by taking the name 'Doyle'.

<sup>49</sup> Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men*, p.186.

<sup>50</sup> Roger Bromley, 'Rewriting the Masculine Script: The Novels of Joseph Hansen', in *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*, ed. by Derek Longhurst (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.102-117 (p.114).

<sup>51</sup> Derek Duncan, 'Aids to Narration: Writing Beyond Gender', in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. by Ann Sintow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (London: Virago, 1984), pp.156-169 (p.167).

<sup>52</sup> Jane, *A Madrigal* (no place: The Nut Hatch Creative Workshope, 1987) p.135 All further references to this edition will be in parentheses in the main body of the text; Mel Keegan, *Fortunes of War*, p.254.

'domineering' qualities stereotypically associated with masculinity,<sup>53</sup> runs through both texts, the sex which accompanies it is more intimate and feminine in *A Madrigal* where:

[Raymond] closed his hands about throbbing genitals, working them until Bodie was gasping, racked by the urgency so ruthlessly aroused[...]Two of the three artists fingers probed him with perfunctory gentleness, that natural tenderness that Raymond would never be without no matter how wild they became. (p.135).

The re-encoding supplied for *Fortunes of War* is significantly different in its sexual ethic. Although in *A Madrigal* the lovers are positioned face to face, in *Fortunes of War* Channon kneels for Robin and this, less intimate, and co-incidentally, less feminised image, sets the tone for the sex in which:

[Robin] worked his genitals almost ruthlessly but denied him release [...] [Channon's] head snapped back and forth as he was probed deeply with perfunctory gentleness. (*FOW* p.254).

In the re-encoding for *Fortunes of War* 'ruthless' becomes tied to a physical action and divorced from the emotive context it has in *A Madrigal*. Gone is the reference to 'that natural tenderness' which in *A Madrigal* qualified the masculine aggression associated with 'perfunctory gentleness'. Even the probing fingers are more masculine in *Fortunes of War* where they are no longer the tender, feminised hands of an 'artist'. In *A Madrigal* the masculine image of mastery implied by 'you are mine' is glossed with a more feminine intimacy; in a sentence which does not exist in *Fortunes of War* it is explained that 'to be mastered', is 'to belong in every part to another, to have no single secret' (p.147). In the original version of this text then, mastery and possessiveness are clearly figured as a form of reciprocal intimacy both mental and physical. Perhaps this image of belonging was removed from the more masculinised *Fortunes of War* because 'to belong to another' is considered a feminine trait in fictional characters,<sup>54</sup> a

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<sup>53</sup> Lloyd B Lueptow, Lori Garouch-Szabo and Margret B. Lueptow, 'Social change and the persistence of sex typing: 1974-1997', *Social Forces*, 80 (2001), pp.1-35 (p.6).

<sup>54</sup> Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith, 'Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines', in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.235-255 (p.243).

feminine trait that would not have posed a problem in the more openly intimatopic text of *A Madrigal*.

As Todd Morrison's interviewees suggested, intimacy itself can seem feminine and the re-encoding of sex from *A Madrigal* to *Fortunes of War* consistently lessens intimate cues, moving the professionally published text away from conceptions of feminine erotics towards more masculine ones. Consider the following scene in which the young inexperienced Robin/Raymond is a bit hasty and the more mature Channon/Bodie is trying to encourage some restraint. In *A Madrigal*:

Bodie began to kiss and cherish, chest belly, sharp hip bones, tender inner thigh, at last working his way toward musky sticky groin. Raymond's hands were clenched into the bedding, his face twisted in exquisite agony. Bodie dropped a kiss on the hot hard head of his cock and saw him stiffen from head to foot. "not yet m' love." (p.29).

This scene was re-encoded for *Fortunes of War* as follows:

Channon kissed breast and belly, sharp hip bones, the softness of inner thigh. Robins hands clenched in the bed linen and his face twisted. Channon watched him shiver as his cock was kissed. "not so quick this time!" (p.65).

The intimacy of *A Madrigal* is re-encoded quite differently in *Fortunes of War* where the love scene is far more perfunctory, closer to, though still significantly distant from, the ideal of male pornography in which writers are advised to aim for 'a plain style – just the facts, the sight, taste, touch and smell of sex'.<sup>55</sup> By contrast *A Madrigal* includes several details which specifically cue intimacy and mutuality; the kisses are a form of 'cherishing', the reader is told that Raymond's twisted face is due to his 'exquisite' experience, and the final demand is less of a command, softened as it is by 'm' love'. This is consistent with many changes to sexual scenes in which *Fortunes of War* removes a number of small emotional details which spell out for the reader the intimate intent behind the actions. The kind of descriptions in *A Madrigal* are, like Renault's sexual passages, more evocative of Andrew Russ' definition of women's erotica with its 'emphasis on

<sup>55</sup> Ralph Bolton, 'Sex Talk: Bodies and Behaviours in Gay Erotica', in *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon: Authenticity, Imagination and Appropriation in Lesbian and Gay Languages*, ed. by William I. Leap (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1995), pp.173-206 (p.182).



[...]tenderness,[...]sentiment',<sup>56</sup> than they are of the stereotypical notion of men's pornography.

The majority of the structural changes that exist between *A Madrigal* and *Fortunes of War* demonstrate that *A Madrigal* is the more openly intimatopic text of the two and suggest that *Fortunes of War* makes deliberate editorial decisions designed to moderate its representation of intimacy. There are two further changes that are particularly significant because they involve the alteration of a considerable amount of the plot structure. Firstly, *Fortunes of War* contains a whole subplot in which Channon and Robin struggle to form a relationship on an equal footing, Channon insists that Robin will take his 'orders' but Robin maintains that he will not be a powerless 'maid' nor 'catamite' (p.309). *A Madrigal* has no parallel to this plot, which appears to have been developed specifically for *Fortunes of War*, indeed in *A Madrigal* Bodie 'had never considered Raymond anything less than his equal' (p.112). In the more intimatopic world of *A Madrigal* reciprocity and equality come naturally to the heroes and do not have to be worked for. The second structural change concerns the representation of penetrative sex. Although the sex scenes are longer and more detailed in *A Madrigal*, *Fortunes of War* includes penetration far earlier in its heroes' sexual relationship. In *A Madrigal* Bodie and Doyle do not have penetrative sex until all misunderstandings are past and indeed Keegan adds that 'if there had ever been a proper time for their coupling it was now' (p.100). In this way *A Madrigal* shows the parallel development of sexual and nonsexual ties of intimacy, which is the most typical pattern of intimatopic texts. It is clear that both *Fortunes of War* and *A Madrigal* are intimatopic in nature, but the intimatopic relationship is far clearer, and far more easily achieved in *A Madrigal*. *A Madrigal*, as presented to the largely female audience of slash fiction readers, is more in line with the intimatopic structures expected by readers within that community, a significant proportion of whom feel that the homoerotic relationships they enjoy reading and writing about are freer from

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Russ, *No respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.185.



'inherent gender roles'<sup>57</sup> than most commercially available fiction. The fact that significant changes were made to *A Madrigal* when it was re-encoded as *Fortunes of War* suggests at least a perceived difference between 'gay' or 'queer' ideologies and 'intimatopic' ideologies. It also hints again at a 'specifically feminine psychology'<sup>58</sup> which does not match the majority of (gay) male expectations, despite the fact that a minority of men, like Michael Ford, complain that male authored depictions of gay sex 'frequently fail to transcend simple fucking'.<sup>59</sup> Strikingly different ideologies are demonstrated by the gay male and intimatopic communities, but interestingly they are not so different that, with a little modification, an intimatopic text cannot be consumed by a gay male readership. Although Salmon and Symons claim that slash fiction does not 'find a receptive audience among gay or any other kind of men'<sup>60</sup> Keegan's novels show that in a slightly altered form it can and does.

History, historiography, literary criticism, literary fiction and appropriative fiction, both professional and amateur, are traditionally considered very differently even though they may be making similar appropriations and interpretations of their sources. This is perhaps because the way readers approach a text is heavily influenced by their perception of its context. Keegan's work however suggests the need for a less structured and divided approach, for her texts may be read as part of two very different genres, as sexy 'gay adventures'<sup>61</sup> written by a professional male writer for a gay male audience, or as women's erotica written by an amateur female television fan, and aimed at other, similarly fannish, women. It is becoming clear that intimatopic texts exist across a range of literary and theoretical works by women, suggesting that a similar spectrum of ideologies inform interpretive practice irrespective of professional

<sup>57</sup> Clark, 'Slash Another View'; Maygra de Khema 'Being my Own Hero' (1999). Essay on line <<http://www.wordsmiths.net/essays.htm>>.

<sup>58</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.19.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Thomas Ford, 'A Real Girl', in *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality*, ed. by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel (California: Cleis Press, 1997), pp.150-159 (p.153).

<sup>60</sup> Salmon and Symons, *Warrior Lovers*, p.5.

<sup>61</sup> According to the back-cover of *Fortunes of War*.

status or context.<sup>62</sup> Although traditionally considered from an ethnographic perspective, their interpretations denied authenticity, slash fans form a clear cut example of a distinct, as opposed to hypothetical, interpretive community of intimatopic readers and writers. As such they provide an excellent insight into the distinctive interpretive practices associated with intimatopia. It is to these fans that I shall now turn, contrasting their interpretive perspectives with those which are often brought to bear on their literature by 'outsiders' attempting to interpret it within hegemonic, rather than intimatopic, ideological contexts.

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<sup>62</sup> Examples of non-fictional intimatopias include Renault's biography of Alexander p.63, Sedgwick's confessional essay, and Rich's lesbian continuum p.136.

**Chapter Five**  
**The Context of Intimacy**  
**Della Van Hise and Her Interpretive Community**

The discrete ideologies associated with individual communities of media fans have been fostered through the close association of like minded individuals over a period of time. Although the ideological perspectives of disparate communities of media fans may vary considerably, intimatopic ideologies are particularly common amongst certain groups of slash fans, whose interpretive practices I have already touched upon in connection to Mel Keegan's *A Madrigal*. As I mentioned in the introduction (p.15), slash fiction is one of the few cases in which the question of women writing about men's relationships has been overtly addressed;<sup>1</sup> however the phenomenon has, thus far, been poorly contextualised. Before continuing with my discussion of slash fans as intimatopic interpreters, I shall pause briefly to define some of the terms I will be using, especially as these have not been consistently defined across different academic communities. For the purposes of this thesis, 'media fan fiction', the most generic of the terms used here, refers to any amateur fiction which appropriates characters, facts or backgrounds from an existing media source be that a television series, a film, a novel or even a celebrity image.<sup>2</sup> 'Slash fiction', refers to media fan fiction which depicts its same sex protagonists (usually appropriated media characters) as physically or romantically attracted to one another, and often involves them in a sexual relationship.<sup>3</sup> The term 'slash' has been used very inconsistently within academia. For instance Mark Dery defines slash very broadly as 'textual poaching in which tales told for mass consumption

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions include Mary Renault, Willa Cather, Marguerite Yourcenar and Anne Rice, but these are isolated examples focusing on the work of single authors and do not connect the texts discussed to any wider genre. See: Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), 53-72; Lorna Milne, '(Fe)Male Impersonation and Transcendence in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires D'Hadrien*', *Women in French Studies*, 7 (1999), 209-218; George E. Haggerty, 'Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 32 (1998), 5-18.

<sup>2</sup> There is media fan fiction based on the X-Files, Star Wars, Anne McCaffrey's fantasy novels and even the celebrity images of boy bands.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'Fem-slash' is sometimes used to distinguish slash fiction about two women, from the more prevalent brand of slash fiction which features two men.

are reworked to suit subcultural needs',<sup>4</sup> whereas Henry Jenkins defines it far more narrowly as: 'a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between series protagonists.'<sup>5</sup> In this case Jenkins' definition comes much closer to mine, although it ignores the occasional use of original characters, of the author's own creation, within existing media contexts. Slash fiction is written almost exclusively by women, and the community dynamics presuppose that any new fan is female, despite the common use of ambiguously gendered pseudonyms.<sup>6</sup> 'K/S' refers to slash fiction specifically about Kirk and Spock, characters appropriated from the original series of *Star Trek* and the subsequent seven movies which involved the same cast. It is standard practice for slash fiction to distinguish different pairings by character initials separated by '/', thus S/Mc refers to slash fiction about Spock and McCoy and B/D refers to slash fiction about Bodie and Doyle heroes of the television series *The Professionals*. K/oc would refer to slash fiction which paired Kirk with a character of the author's own creation.<sup>7</sup> By contrast to K/S, 'KandS' fiction refers to fan fiction in which the two men are 'just' friends; that friendship may be depicted as very intense, but is never denoted as sexually or erotically motivated. KandS stories which are sometimes referred to as 'relationship stories' or 'gen stories' are not slash fiction although the exact dividing line between KandS and K/S is still sometimes contested by fans.

Fan fiction, of various types, is published in 'zines'; unlike the zines associated with certain music and Sci-Fi communities, these are almost entirely fiction, with occasional art, reviews or adverts for future zines.<sup>8</sup> Zines may be compilations of stories (usually between 3 and 10 short stories in one zine of 150-300 pages) or stand alone novels. Many compilation zines are produced regularly over a period of many years and indeed the longest running compilation

<sup>4</sup> Mark Dery, 'Glossary', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 92 (1993), 851-854, (p.853).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London: Routledge 1992), p.186.

<sup>6</sup> This was illustrated by the discomfort expressed by a number of fans when a very popular writer was revealed to be a man: 'imagine my feelings, thinking I was in a women-only space then finding it was not so'. (Kathy in *The K/S Press* 23, July 1998, p.24).

<sup>7</sup> The use of the slash mark in this way is what gave the genre its name.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of other types of zines see, Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997).

zine in K/S fandom, *First Time*, is currently up to issue number 56.<sup>9</sup> Almost all zines are subject to editorial control and it is inaccurate to view fan fiction as fiction without editorial constraints; zine editors can, and do, reject stories they feel to be unsuitable for their publications. Fan fiction is also published on the internet, in which case the editorial process may vary from quite stringent, in case of so called 'e-zines' to nonexistent, on many Yahoo groups and personal web pages. Fan fiction communities, and there are many, may communicate through a 'letter-zine', usually produced at regular intervals and distributed either via e-mail or traditional postage. In the K/S zine community this letter-zine is called *The K/S Press*, and it too is subject to editorial control. Communication is also achieved via online newsgroups such as those hosted by Yahoo. Indeed a search for 'slash fiction' on [www.yahogroups.com](http://www.yahogroups.com), returns 703 matches reflecting the extreme diversity of modern slash fiction communities. These newsgroups might be private, with membership by invitation only, public but moderated (akin to the editing of a letter-zine), or public and unmoderated. Many of the quotations from K/S zine fans in the following discussion are taken from messages posted to a private Yahoo newsgroup known as 'KirkSpockHeaven' which has 14 members. Larger, more public, newsgroups for K/S fans may have as many as 400 members from a variety of westernised cultures. Fans also meet face to face at conventions, which may be very generic and run by professionals for commercial gain, or may be very specific and run by individual fans. Currently there is a K/S specific convention held tri-annually in the USA (KiS Con) and annually in the UK (K/S CONnections). These conventions are both run solely by fans.

The extreme diversity of slash, and other types of fan fiction, means that it has become impossible to talk about media fandom or slash fiction as if they constituted a cohesive phenomenon. I should make it clear that not all slash fiction is intimatopic in nature, indeed much of it is not, however the fiction produced by the K/S zine community, which forms the basis of the following discussion, predominantly is and I have chosen to focus on it for this very

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<sup>9</sup> As of April 2005



reason.<sup>10</sup> Within the community associated with the production and consumption of K/S zines, there is a history of approximately 2,900 stories, published in about 550 zines. Emerging in the early 1970s, just a few years after the final episode of *Star Trek: The Original Series* was shown on US television, K/S, the first slash fiction fandom, originated when several women independently began to write their own amateur fiction which centred around a much discussed topic in *Star Trek* fan circles at the time: could Captain Kirk and his First Officer Spock be lovers? It seems that the idea of interpreting the intimate relationship between Kirk and Spock as erotic occurred to several people simultaneously and a strictly linear history of K/S is impossible.<sup>11</sup> Although, the first K/S story 'A Fragment out of Time' was published in September 1974 in an adult zine called 'Grup',<sup>12</sup> K/S stories had been circulating between friends for several years prior to that. The first compilation zine to be dedicated solely to K/S was *Alternative: Epilog to Orion* which was published in 1976. From these beginnings the phenomenon grew and, 30 years on, there are 10 K/S only compilation zines seeking submissions, and 8 editors publishing both compilation zines and novels.

Traditional academic investigations of media fan fiction rarely consider the activities of fans as either literary or intellectual despite the fact that as Christian Moraru points out, referring to professional writers, 'the re-writer is a critical reader in the deepest sense.'<sup>13</sup> Although the fan fiction writer chooses to ignore the legalities of copyright, and thus forfeits her place in the mainstream market, the negotiations that fans make with their source material are almost identical to those made by professional appropriative novelists. Henry Jenkins, who has written prolifically about the cultural phenomenon of media fan fiction,

<sup>10</sup> Some other slash fandoms are also largely intimatopic in nature. Often the more intimatopic fandoms are the older ones with a history of print zines such as *The Professionals* and *Starsky and Hutch*. K/S is considered by slash fans to be the most 'romantic' slash fandom.

<sup>11</sup> The K/S fans themselves are interested in preserving and tracing the history of their fandom but it seems as if the concept of K/S originated simultaneously in the UK, the USA and Australia at about the same time - around 1969/70. Any un-referenced information on fandom in this thesis has been gleaned from conversations with other fans. I have been involved in the world of K/S since about 1992 and have collected a great deal of information from fans. Further details of the history of K/S and slash fiction can be found on line

<<http://www.beyonddreamspress.com/database.htm>> and <[www.foresmutters.org](http://www.foresmutters.org)>.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Marie Verba, *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History, 1967-1987* (Minnesota: FTL Publications, 1996), p.19.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and the Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p.4.

implies that appropriations made by fans are different from those made by professional writers, because fans 're-conceptualize characters so that they may better serve fan interests'.<sup>14</sup> However this tactic is equally common amongst professional appropriative novelists, indeed I have already discussed in some detail how Pat Barker makes Rivers and Sassoon serve her own ideological interests and how it is the resonance between the writers' ideological framework and the possibilities offered by the source that drives appropriation. Critics who, like Camille Bacon Smith, diminish media fan fiction for its appropriation of 'a standard set of characters and situations'<sup>15</sup> fail to concede that the professional appropriative novelist must combine originality and derivation in much the same way as the fan writer. In the case of K/S fiction, *Star Trek* functions in the same way as the historical sources do for many of the texts already considered in this thesis: in both fannish and professional appropriative fiction originality is valued, but, crucially, **only** within the parameters imposed by the source material. The majority of K/S fiction is closely allied with its appropriative source, and the majority of K/S fans consider the characterisations in the best K/S stories to be 'a fairly faithful representation of Kirk and Spock as I see them on screen'.<sup>16</sup> The skill that is most valued in fan fiction, that of telling an original story which is plausible within its appropriated context, is one which is also valued in professional fiction as can be seen by examining responses to Mary Renault's Alexander trilogy. These novels are praised for the 'historical accuracy' that makes them 'completely convincing' but, far from being creatively diminished, they are also praised as 'one of this century's most unexpectedly original works of art'.<sup>17</sup>

Like many historical sources, televised *Star Trek*, has no single author, for although Gene Roddenberry was the initial creator of the *Star Trek* universe, the televised episodes thought of as 'canon' are the result of input from multiple

<sup>14</sup> Henry Jenkins, 'If I Could Speak With Your Sound: Fan Music, Textual Proximity and Liminal Identification', *Camera Obscura*, 23 (1990), 149-175 (p.156).

<sup>15</sup> Camille Bacon Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2000), p.114.

<sup>16</sup> From a survey I conducted at two K/S conventions in 2004. When asked to describe 'K/S at its best' by far the majority of respondents chose, 'K/S at its best is a fairly faithful representation of Kirk and Spock as I see them on screen'. (for full details see appendix one)

<sup>17</sup> Mary Renault, *Funeral Games* (New York: Pinnacle Books, 1982). Comments from the dust jacket and preparatory pages.

script writers, directors, producers and actors.<sup>18</sup> This means that the canon of *Star Trek* is, like the historical canon, full of ideological contradictions and uncertainties, making both of them open ended sources that provide ample opportunity for multiple interpretations and re-encodings. Indeed, Henry Jenkins describes *Star Trek* in terms which could speak equally well of the fragmentary nature of many historical sources as ‘an unstable composite of multiple generic and ideological traditions which becomes coherent only within specific reading formations’.<sup>19</sup> Just as historical novels are often criticised for the perceived inaccuracy of their interpretation, academic debates about K/S fiction have often focused on the legitimacy, or otherwise, of the decoding they make of *Star Trek*.<sup>20</sup> The consensus of such debates varies, from those who feel that K/S is only ‘very minimally’ based on *Star Trek*, to those who feel K/S is ‘already present in the [*Star Trek*] narratives’, or is a subtext that can ‘easily be made to be there’ by the intervention of creative decoding.<sup>21</sup> The debate continues with Sara Gwenllian Jones’ recent assertion that K/S functions to ‘extend the narrative logics’<sup>22</sup> of its source. Meanwhile, I feel it would be of more relevance to consider how, rather than how accurately, K/S interprets its source.<sup>23</sup>

For those investigating just how K/S fiction re-encodes its source material the visibility of K/S fandom provides an unparalleled insight into the interpretive community that produces and consumes K/S. Thus far I have discussed Stanley Fish’s idea of the ‘interpretive community’<sup>24</sup> in hypothetical terms as a group of

<sup>18</sup> Chris Gregory, *Star Trek: Parallel Narratives* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.4.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Jenkins, ‘“Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations”: Genre and Authorship in *Star Trek*’, in *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*, ed. by John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.175-195 (p.178).

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Kopelson, *Love’s Litany: The Writing of Modern Homoerotics* (California: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Joanna Russ, *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts: Feminist Essays* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1985), p.80; Ilsa J. Bick, ‘Boys in Space: *Star Trek* Latency and the Never-ending Story’, in *Enterprise Zones: Critical Responses to Star Trek*, ed. by Taylor Harrison, Sarah Projansky, Kent A Ono and Elyce Rae Helford (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), p.160; Constance Penley, ‘Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics and Technology’, in *Cultural Politics Volume 3: Technoculture*, ed. by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp.135-161 (p.137).

<sup>22</sup> Sara Gwenllian Jones, ‘The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters’, *Screen*, 43 (2002), 79-90 (p.81).

<sup>23</sup> For a small scale study of interpretation see: Elizabeth Woledge, ‘Decoding Desire: From Kirk and Spock to K/S’, *Social Semiotics*, 15 (2005), 235-250.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? An Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p358.

unconnected individuals sharing a distinctive interpretive perspective. K/S writers and readers, however, form a real life example of a dynamic interpretive community within which readers respond to the text in similar ways. Since the literature they produce is distinctively intimatopic, the captive community of K/S fans provides an unprecedented opportunity to explore intimatopic interpretive practices first hand, and to attempt a truly contextualised reading of, at least one part of, the intimatopic genre. Traditional readings of K/S fiction have not always been very successful in contextualising the amateur literature they examine and often highlight its sexual, rather than intimate, nature. Andrew Ross claims, completely inaccurately, that 'slash is always graphically sexual'<sup>25</sup> and Penley claims, equally inaccurately, that most fans delight in 'guerrilla erotics'<sup>26</sup> enjoying the shock value of K/S zines.<sup>27</sup> Both these approaches, in their ignorance or dismissal of the many conservative stories and fans, fail to interpret K/S in its own terms, preferring those which serve their own interest in the subversive acts of minority groups. Those who do not contextualise K/S in such pornographic terms tend towards classifying it as a type of romantopia, with Salmon and Symons claiming that K/S is extremely 'similar to mainstream genre romances'<sup>28</sup> and Gwenllian Jones adding that K/S 'emulates' the style of romance novels.<sup>29</sup> However this approach fails to take account of the terms in which K/S fans describe their own interpretive practice (see p.203). The interpretations of these academic readers of K/S are, no less than the fan's interpretation of *Star Trek*, inflected by the ideologies which are common to their interpretive communities. The K/S community's interpretive practice is in fact neither pornotopic nor romantopic but rather it is clearly intimatopic. Within the almost exclusively female interpretive community of K/S writers and readers, intimatopic ideologies are normative and unremarkable, like hegemonic ideologies in the wider culture, they are taken for granted and unlikely to be overtly debated or discussed without prompting. However, just as it is a mistake

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.256.

<sup>26</sup> Penley, 'Brownian Motion', p.136.

<sup>27</sup> In fact many K/S stories contain nothing more graphic than an kiss, and many fans exhibit concerns over the explicit covers on some zines. A sizable proportion of fans are extremely secretive about their involvement in K/S and keep their zines out of sight.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Salmon and Don Symons, 'Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology', *Journal of Sex Research*, 41 (2004), 94-100 (p.97).

<sup>29</sup> Gwenllian Jones, 'Sex Lives', p.80.



to leave unquestioned the hegemonic ideologies which find expression in many forms of mainstream literature, it is problematic to attempt an understanding of K/S, without exposing and explicating its discrete ideological context.<sup>30</sup>

### Understanding Intimatopic Communities

Many academics have tried to explain why K/S fans read and write K/S fiction and their answers are as various as their critical positions. Henry Jenkins thinks that K/S fans wish to critique modern masculinity, Camille Bacon Smith that they are trying to work out the hurts they have suffered in real life, Constance Penley that they are articulating feminist utopias, Lamb and Veith that they are exploring the possibilities for heterosexual romance, Salmon and Symons that they are expressing their biological needs and Joanna Russ that it they are trying to depict the love and sex that they really want within the restrictions imposed by patriarchy.<sup>31</sup> All these interpretations have some validity and indeed talking to K/S fans would soon demonstrate that their reasons for reading and writing K/S are as various as the fans themselves. These attempts to discover why K/S is produced appear to be the result of a traditionally ethnographic approach which focuses on the need which K/S fulfils rather than the construction and production of the literature which it embodies. It is interesting that though literary criticism of popular literature often focuses on its sociological and psychological function, these issues are discussed comparatively rarely in considerations of literature from the academic canon. The motivations of popular or amateur writers are often assumed to be homogenous where as those of canonical writers are more often assumed to be individual and esoteric. Personally I believe that, in either case, the question of motivation is often undercut by the reality of individuation, if I had been in a position to ask Mary

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<sup>30</sup> This is an extension of the cultural materialist perspective in which the importance of studying literature in its own cultural context is emphasised by an approach which 'sees texts as inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception'. See Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. viii.

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Camille Bacon Smith, *Enterprising women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Penley, 'Brownian Motion'; Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith, 'Romantic Myth, Transcendence and *Star Trek* Zines', in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.235-255; Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons, *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001); Russ, *Magic Mommas*.



Renault, Susan Hill, Pat Barker and Mel Keegan *why* they wrote intimatopic fiction their answers may have varied dramatically even though their novels are ideologically similar. This diversity in motivation is probably the case within any interpretive community and must be acknowledged even as textual analysis and direct questioning reveal that ideological perspectives are shared within different communities. K/S, like any other form of literature, is an ideologically informed creative practice which will vary in its personal or political investments. Rather than asking why this literature is produced, I would prefer to consider the interpretations which inform its production and hence elucidate the ideologically informed interpretive strategies of the community that produces it.

Hegemonic ideologies have been explicated by psychological and sociological investigations, involving observation and analysis. In order to access the opinions and perspectives of the interpretive community embodied by K/S writers and readers, I have attended 3 conventions for K/S fans, asked copious questions and conducted a number of surveys both at conventions and online.<sup>32</sup> My surveys, although a minor part of my investigation of intimatopia, focused on interpretation and re-encoding, attempting to ascertain which cues are of interest to intimatopic communities and how those cues are resituated in the literature they produce. Such a surveying technique, though not traditional in literary criticism, seems a productive way of addressing a large number of individual interpretations such as those found within K/S fiction. From the results of my surveys it can be seen that K/S readers and writers share with professional intimatopic writers a distinctive set of ideological investments. Penley seems unsure whether fans think that 'there was an erotic homosexual subtext' in *Star Trek* or whether they think that 'one could easily be *made* to be there'.<sup>33</sup> In fact 70% of fans believe that Kirk and Spock were intended by the creators of *Star Trek* to be 'very close friends', 26% believe they were intended to be 'in love but

<sup>32</sup> My access to this community has been facilitated by my long term involvement as an artist. I have been involved in the K/S community, since about 1992 and thus I believe I have a fairly good appreciation of its ideological perspective. Throughout this chapter I write as both fan and academic; I consider this a privileged position from which I have access both to the dominant discourses of K/S fandom and fiction, and the academic paradigms with which to interpret them. In this respect I might class myself as an 'academic-fan': one who uses their academic position to attempt to explain the fannish practices they are familiar with. Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002.)

<sup>33</sup> Penley, 'Brownian Motion', p.137

not lovers' and none believe they were intended to be 'lovers'. Thus it seems that the majority of K/S fans believe a 'subtext' must be made by their own creative intervention. Asked how they personally interpreted Kirk and Spock's relationship in *Star Trek* 59% answered that they saw them as 'in love but not lovers', 26% that they saw them as 'lovers' and 11% that they saw them as 'just friends'.<sup>34</sup> Thus it appears that the K/S community enjoys the potential for erotic interpretation that *Star Trek* possesses and the pleasure they find in K/S fiction is partly derived from the creative intervention which realises those potentials. Thus they share with professional writers a desire to use re-encoding to offer new interpretations of ambiguous sources. K/S fans even have a term for the unrealised erotic potentials that they enjoy extracting from *Star Trek*, they call such ambiguous scenes or images 'slashy'. In describing something as 'slashy' fans do not mean that it is already eroticised, but that it has the potential to be eroticised by application of their own interpretive practices. So just what is 'slashy' to the K/S community? To address this question I conducted a survey at an American K/S convention held in March 2004 (15 respondents) and at a British K/S convention held in August 2004 (15 respondents). I shall present the resulting data here, before using it to inform the specific debates which follow. First of all I asked respondents to score elements from *Star Trek* for their importance to the fans interpretation of *Star Trek* as slashy. By combining the resulting scores I am able to offer the following list of reasons why *Star Trek* seems slashy to K/S fans: from the most important to the least, *Star Trek* seems slashy because,<sup>35</sup>

1. Kirk and Spock's greatest commitments seem to be to each other.
2. Kirk and Spock are emotionally dependant on one another.
3. Kirk and Spock hold eye contact a lot.
4. Kirk and Spock rely on each other personally.
5. Kirk and Spock share their emotions and feelings.
6. Kirk and Spock seem jealous of each others other relationships.
7. Kirk and Spock can use the mind-meld the share their feelings.
8. Kirk and Spock exchange casual touches.

<sup>34</sup> Survey results from K/S questionnaire distributed at two K/S conventions in 2004. The remaining 4% in each case answered that 'One is in love with the other but not visa versa'.

<sup>35</sup> Full survey and results can be found in appendix one (p.251)

9. Kirk and Spock stand very close to one another
10. Kirk and Spock always end up together despite temporary love interests.
11. Kirk and Spock are always together
12. Kirk and Spock are very close friends
13. Neither Kirk nor Spock has a steady girlfriend or wife.
14. Kirk and Spock must rely on each other professionally
15. Kirk and Spock must work closely together.
16. We see Kirk without his shirt on a lot.

Although many of these 'slashy' elements are ones that the majority of people would recognise as ambiguous cues, such as the casual touches and eye contact, many of them are cues which the majority would interpret as clearly social, rather than sexual, such as loyalty and friendship. Within the K/S community however, commitment, loyalty and sharing of feelings suggest ambiguity. That the K/S community interprets signs of intimacy, both social, and ambiguous as 'slashy' suggests just how close their ideological perspective is to that of other intimatopic writers, who similarly co-opt a wide range of social and ambiguous intimacies.

Next I asked my respondents to consider which elements they thought were important in K/S fiction. The results show that, from the most important to the least, K/S fiction is valued for its,

1. Emotional sharing.
2. Exploration of how friendship develops into love.
3. Expression of feelings
4. Depiction of equality between Kirk and Spock.
5. Depiction of the friendship that Kirk and Spock share.
6. Sex that is emotional.
7. Depiction of mutual dependency between Kirk and Spock.
8. Sex that is passionate
9. Sex that is tender.
10. Acknowledgement of Kirk and Spock's professional lives together.
11. Images of Oneness, such as but not limited to the mind meld.
12. Depiction of an ideal relationship (at least by the end of the story)
13. Descriptions of how Kirk and Spock work together to solve a problem.

14. At least one sex scene
15. Exploration of the power structures between Kirk and Spock.<sup>36</sup>
16. Physical and emotional suffering.

There are some clear correspondences here between elements which have potential to be read as slashy and elements that find expression in K/S slash fiction. The most notable correspondence is in the perceived importance of emotional expression; it was seen as having a high potential for erotic interpretation and was highly valued in the resulting fiction. There are also some interesting discrepancies. Considering that intimatopic texts make connections between love and friendship, it is interesting that Kirk and Spock's friendship as a whole was not interpreted as particularly slashy, although depiction of friendship was ranked as highly important in K/S fiction. Perhaps the emphasis on friendship becomes increasingly important as the concurrent eroticism is made manifest? For, as one fan, Mary, writes in *The K/S Press* 'the most important factor in the K/S sexual relationship is the K/S friendship'.<sup>37</sup>

From an intimatopic perspective *Star Trek* provides an ideal source for appropriation and re-encoding, as it readily resonates with the ideological perspective of the intimatopic interpreter. Many K/S readers feel that K/S fiction is satisfying to them because it 'highlights something that is already in *Star Trek*'.<sup>38</sup> Since it is already apparent that the K/S community does not believe that *Star Trek* has a pre-existing sexual subtext, I would suggest that that 'something' is interpersonal intimacy, connotations of which saturate the *Star Trek* narratives. Although *Star Trek* was designed to be multicultural and anti-sexist the original series is essentially a homosocial world in which men's relationships with other men, both personal and professional, take precedence over anything else. It depicts, as the critic Deegan suggests, 'a deeply bonded essentially male group' in which the 'male bond is the emotional focus'.<sup>39</sup> However, Deegan's insistence that 'any hint of homosexual overtones[...]would destroy this vision of

<sup>36</sup> Although ranking almost last overall, this was the one issue that elicited very different responses from British and American fans. British fans thought it was much more important.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Sweeney, *The K/S Press*, 27 November 1998, p.25.

<sup>38</sup> From survey responses to the question, 'I read K/S Because...' (see appendix one).

<sup>39</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, 'Sexism in Space: The Freudian Formula in *Star Trek*', in *Eros in the Minds Eye: Sexuality and the Fantastic in Art and Film*, ed. by Donald Palumbo (London: Greenwood Press, 1986) pp.209-224 (p.210, p.211).



heterosexual male bonding<sup>40</sup> is inaccurate for, like many homosocial sources, *Star Trek* is an ambiguous text which, whilst never denoting anything more than friendship between its male characters, contains many erotic cues. Neatly using an ambiguous term to describe the ambiguities they perceive, media critics Wagner and Lundeen describe the male friendships in *Star Trek* as possessing a 'romantic quality'.<sup>41</sup> Like many ambiguous sources of interest to intimatopic interpreters, such as trench literature and Plato's dialogues, *Star Trek* contains a number of intimate images which may be highlighted by various re-encodings. K/S fiction makes use of *Star Trek*'s ambiguous and homosocial context within which its heroes may legitimately express intimacy. Even Gene Roddenberry's own re-encoding of *Star Trek*, which became increasingly refined through numerous interviews and public appearances, shows how he gradually re-encoded *Star Trek*'s ambiguities in terms of specific interpersonal intimacy. In 1975, 6 years after the last *Star Trek* episode had been shown on US television, Roddenberry claimed of Kirk and Spock's relationship, 'I definitely designed it as a love relationship. And I hope that for men[...]who have been afraid of such relationships[...]that they [Kirk and Spock] would encourage them to be able to feel love and affection, true affection [...]love, friendship and deep respect.'<sup>42</sup> By the time of his death in 1991 Roddenberry was claiming that this 'profound relationship', 'a love relationship', 'could be considered the essence of *Star Trek*'.<sup>43</sup> Thus Roddenberry gradually re-encodes *Star Trek* as increasingly intimate, an intimacy that eventually becomes so central that Roddenberry sees it as the 'essence' of his creation. Roddenberry's continual use of the ambiguous term 'love' highlights the erotic possibilities of his creation, even whilst the central issue remains one of intimacy rather than of sex. Roddenberry's ambiguous re-encoding of *Star Trek* only hints at the erotic potentials that K/S fiction makes manifest.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Deegan, 'Sexism in Space', p.212.

<sup>41</sup> Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos* (London: Praeger, 1998), p.106.

<sup>42</sup> Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Sondra Marshak and Joan Winston, *Star Trek Lives!* (London: Corgi, 1975), p.152.

<sup>43</sup> Yvonne Fern, *Inside the Mind of Gene Roddenberry* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p.67.

<sup>44</sup> Opinions differ as to Roddenberry's own attitude towards K/S; the official biography claims that he was furious about it, whilst it is said in fandom that he was very tolerant, curious even, and owned a number of explicit zines himself. David Alexander, *Star Trek Creator: The Authorized Biography of Gene Roddenberry* (London: Bantam, 1994); K/S Fan Jenna claims that: 'I know that he had a row of K/S zines in his bookcase in his office which was seen by Carol



Central to the intimatopic re-encoding of *Star Trek* that K/S fans are making is the connection of love, friendship and intimacy. Fans are drawn particularly to 'the intimacy implied in the devotion between captain and first officer,'<sup>45</sup> and the elements which they rank as highly slashy evoke a range of the intimacies. The highest ranking elements such as 'emotional dependency', 'personal reliance' and the sharing of 'emotions and feelings' are common to both love and friendship, at least as women most often perceive them.<sup>46</sup> Physical signs of intimacy such as 'eye contact', 'casual touches' and physical proximity also ranked highly, and again these are all images that may be evoked by a variety of interpersonal relationships and I have already discussed their intimate connotations in works by Pat Barker, Mary Renault and Susan Hill. Lower ranking elements such as that Kirk and Spock 'rely on each other professionally' and 'work closely together' may be explained by professional necessity rather than interpreted as signs of love and friendship and it may be for this reason that they are valued less highly by intimatopic interpreters. The lowest ranking element, that we see 'Kirk without his shirt on a lot' is the only one which does not evoke some kind of interpersonal intimacy, except perhaps between Kirk and his audience. Thus there is a clear spectrum of interest in interpersonal interaction, from that which seems characteristic of love and friendship as well as intimacy, which is highly privileged, to that which seems characteristic only of professional interaction, which is given far less salience. It is those cues which appear to privatise the homosocial experience which are most valued by the appropriative readers in K/S fandom.

Within intimatopic interpretive practices, intimate cues such as those suggested by the kinship imagery invoked by Kirk's claim in the episode 'Whom Gods Destroy', that Starfleet has made him and Spock 'Brothers',<sup>47</sup> can be

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Davis in the 80s.' (Jenna, From E-mail posted to Yahoo News Group 'Kirk Spock Heaven', 11 March 2002.)

<sup>45</sup> An anonymous response to the survey question 'Can you give any concrete examples from TOS [*Star Trek, The Original Series*] which make you think it's 'slashy'?

<sup>46</sup> This assumption is based on comments already discussed which imply that women's rather than men's friendships involve personal disclosures and reliance. For more details see, Drury Sherrod, 'The Bonds of Men: Problems and Possibilities in Close Male Relationships', in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. by Harry Brod (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987); *Men's Friendships*, ed. by Peter M. Nardi (London: Sage, 1992)

<sup>47</sup> From: 'Whom Gods Destroy' Teleplay by Lee Erwin, Story by Lee Erwin and Jerry Sohl, Directed by Herb Wallerstein, 1969.

interpreted as having erotic potential. Although hegemonic ideologies separate images of kinship from sexual connotation, intimatopic interpretive communities suggest a fluid connection between any evocation of intimacy and the erotic; as one K/S fan points out, in her ideological world, 'spiritual closeness and sex are two halves of a whole; thoughts of one lead naturally to thoughts of the other.'<sup>48</sup> Central to the K/S community's re-encoding of Kirk and Spock's relationship is a fictional Vulcan word which encapsulates the connection of love, friendship and intimacy that they find attractive. The term, '*Th'y'la*' was appropriated from Gene Roddenberry's novelisation of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* in which a footnote to the Vulcan term defines it as follows: 'The human concept of *friend* is most nearly duplicated in Vulcan thought by the term *t'hy'la* which can also mean *brother* and *lover*.'<sup>49</sup> Although Roddenberry equates the term with 'the human concept' of friendship, it is curious how different it actually is, for in modern western culture, 'friend' does not 'also' mean 'brother' and, as Vicki Bertram points out, is often defined in opposition to 'lover'.<sup>50</sup> However the idea that one single term might encapsulate a spectrum of intimacies, from friendship to love, is one which is particularly likely to resonate within any intimatopic community. Reflecting this, one long standing compilation zine is even called *T'hy'la* and as one fan writes, 'thank god we have the word *T'hy'la*, because, as far as I know, we don't have a word in English to convey the depth of this relationship.'<sup>51</sup> Indeed, there is a frustration with terminology when fan writer Jenna has Spock remark 'there are some relationships that defy categorization [...] but [...] I thought it was conventional human wisdom that the best lovers are also friends?'<sup>52</sup> Conventional wisdom it is, but only uncontested within the intimatopic community.

<sup>48</sup> From the fanzine *Charisma* 15, 1992. These comments were offered by Bonita Kale, Ohio, quoted from an article written in the Cleveland Ohio *Ansible*.

<sup>49</sup> Gene Roddenberry, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (London: Futura, 1979) p.18-19. See also <<http://thyla.com/thyla.html>> for a full discussion of the term and the negotiation that Roddenberry makes with the ambiguities he suggests.

<sup>50</sup> Vicki Bertram, 'Problems with (Girl)Friends? Contemporary Women Poets and Tensions in Female Friendship', in *Celebrating Women's Friendship: Past Present and Future*, ed. by Ruth A. Symes, Ann Kaloski and Heloise Brown (York: Raw Nerve Books, 1999), pp.181-214. Vicki asks if friendship in modern western culture can 'include those relationships that also have a sexual intimacy' she is forced to answer 'conventionally[...] "no."' p.181.

<sup>51</sup> Jungle Kitty, *The K/S Press*, 24 August 1998, p.16.

<sup>52</sup> Jenna Sinclair, *In The Shade* vol. 1 (no place: Beyond Dreams Press, 2005), p.179.

Like many sexual intimatopias K/S fiction extends the range of intimate cues it finds in its source towards the erotic, for instance, though *T'hy'la* is only used to denote friendship in canonical sources, in K/S fiction it nearly always denotes sexual attraction as well. From an intimatopic perspective erotic intimacy is a logical extension of the interpersonal intimacy suggested by the source. Just like Mary Renault's novels, in which erotic relationships are built upon established friendships, and Keegan's novels, in which male lovers develop firm friendships, K/S fiction exists in contrast to masculine ideologies under which 'love and friendship' are 'distinct, if not oppositional, categories'.<sup>53</sup> The move from professional and personal intimacies towards their erotic expression is a central part of many K/S stories which often make overt connections across a spectrum of intimacies. In her short story 'LeMatya Lessons' K/S writer S.R. Benjamin captures Spock's internal thoughts as he makes love to Kirk thus:

He calls my name, breathlessly. I grasp his shoulders moving against him. This is the logical extension of everything we are. It is, on a deeper level, the same rhythm with which for years we have walked ships' corridors at night. Or the way we moved, pacing each other, on Organia. And my hand against his elbow, urging him on, as we raced along the embankment on the shore leave planet, where a golden-haired girl and a white rabbit had become the least of our concerns.<sup>54</sup>

The ideological repercussions are clear; for this writer and many of her readers, sexual interaction is a 'deeper level' of intimacy than friendship, but one which is founded on 'the same' elements of professional and personal intimacy. S.R. Benjamin makes reference to ambiguous gestural codes, which in *Star Trek* connote friendship and concern, connotations which are imported into the intimate landscape of Benjamin's erotic world. Within the K/S community a whole spectrum of interpersonal intimacies are appropriated to become signs of erotic love. In another passage which makes many overt references to its source, K/S writer Deanna Gray, uses Kirk's thoughts as part of her rhetorical fiction which connects the socially intimate to the sexual:

From the beginning Spock had given him loyalty and devotion that surpassed what duty and his Starfleet

<sup>53</sup> Kevin Kopelson, *Love's Litany: The writing of Modern Homoerotics* (California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.109.

<sup>54</sup> S.R. Benjamin, 'LeMatya Lessons', *Beyond Dreams*, 4 (2002), 80-87 (p86) [fanzine].

oath required. Kirk had blindly thought it was because they were friends as well as a team. But thinking back on it now, he realised just how much Spock did for him. How protective he was, how willing to do anything Kirk wanted. How many times had he shielded Kirk with his mind, with his body? How many times had he stood up for his captain, even against Starfleet? What could it be but love?<sup>55</sup>

Like many of the extracts from professional novels already considered (p.69 and p.87) this quotation provides the reader with a guide to intimatopic interpretation. Intimatopic ideologies do not 'blindly' assume that intimacy is simply professional obligation or friendship, but read interpersonal possibilities into signs of caring and loyalty. These characteristic interpretations not only read intimacy as erotic, for friendship becomes a sign of love, but also eroticise intimacy, for sex is envisaged as following the same 'rhythm' as other intimacies.

I have already mentioned how Keegan uses a broad spectrum of intimacies in her depiction of sexual relationships and K/S fiction frequently makes similar encodings. Just as Keegan's lovers will remain friends, when Kirk and Spock become sexually involved in the K/S novel *A Question of Balance*, it is a move that will make them 'lovers as well as brothers'.<sup>56</sup> The author of this novel does not replace the image of brothers with that of lovers; she does not overwrite the kinship imagery appropriated from the source with sexual imagery, but rather she adds erotic cues to the kinship cues already appropriated. She does not, as Bacon Smith insists K/S fans do, interpret the source 'against the narrative grain',<sup>57</sup> because, from her perspective, social intimacy can and does connote the possibility of erotic intimacy. Whilst the interpretations of the K/S community work towards eroticising the intimacies they find in their source, they do not enhance eroticism by divorcing it from the intimate context that contains it in the ambiguous text of *Star Trek*. This is partly because, as one fan puts it, 'K/S fans don't want plumbing, they want the emotional context, they want the

<sup>55</sup> Deanna Gray, 'Shadow Touch', *Beyond Dreams*, 4 (2002), 17-26 (p.22) [fanzine].

<sup>56</sup> Della Van Hise, *A Question of Balance* (California: Pon Farr Press, 1980) p.43 [fanzine].

<sup>57</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women* p.232



intimacy.<sup>58</sup> Like Hill and Barker, (who add erotic elements to appropriated sources) and Renault and Keegan (who both add intimacy to eroticism), K/S writers depict intimacy as erotic and insist the erotic retains its intimacy because, as Jenna puts it, 'ideally, lovers are also best friends'.<sup>59</sup>

Modern readers who approach the, sometimes graphically sexual, texts of K/S fiction from hegemonic ideological perspectives or from within 'queer' communities may well miss the crucial connections between love and friendship and find salient only the sexual elements. I have already mentioned how hard the sexually intimatopic text has to work to avoid the intimacy it encodes being solely ascribed to the sexual relationship it depicts, and yet interpreting K/S through the sexual passages it contains is to miss the community's ideological investment in moderated eroticism and its, perhaps surprising, rejection of sex as the central defining principle of human interaction. Indeed, despite the often sexual nature of their fiction, K/S fans are insistent that, 'K/S has not, will not, and never will be about the sex. It's about the intimacy.' When fan writer Deanna Gray said this at a convention, another fan added in agreement that 'women require intimacy' and the audience broke into spontaneous applause.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that the fans themselves believe their fiction reflects a 'specifically feminine psychology' of the type that Felski warned us against assuming.<sup>61</sup> The centrality of intimacy as opposed to sex is borne out by the survey I conducted in which the K/S community did not show much interest in solely physical cues, but only those which added intimacy to the physicality already suggested, such as moments in which Kirk and Spock held one another's gaze, or offered physical support in times of emotional duress. The K/S community does not put a particularly high value on the sexual nature of its re-encodings, indeed 5 elements, referencing emotional expression, friendship and reciprocity all ranked higher in importance to K/S fiction than any kind of sex. The fact that 'the inclusion of at least one sex scene' was ranked only 14<sup>th</sup> by readers of K/S fiction highlights just how unimportant sex really is to the genre. In fact as Henry

<sup>58</sup> Anon, from notes taken during a panel at a K/S convention in the USA, March 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Jenna, Kirk Spock Heaven 25 March 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Anon, from notes taken during a panel at a K/S convention in the USA, March 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.19



Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* points out, 'sexually explicit sequences often constitute only a small part of lengthy and complex narratives.'<sup>62</sup> It is not even particularly uncommon for a K/S story to contain no sexual passages at all, so long as the primary emotional drive of the story is focused on Kirk and Spock's erotic attraction for one another, that attraction need not be fully realised for the text to be considered K/S.

Though writing erotic fiction may not seem the most logical way of expressing ideologies in which intimacy is of more importance than sex, in fact it may be an important move, for, unlike the ambiguous text with its hints at connections between eroticism and intimacy, the sexual intimatopic text insists upon this connection. Whilst *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry claimed that intimacy may be 'sexual or not. It doesn't matter'<sup>63</sup> *Star Trek* itself only explored how intimacy worked in nonsexual contexts; K/S goes one step further and asks how that intimacy might work within a sexual relationship. The answer K/S fiction offers, similar to that offered by Keegan's novels, is that a sexual relationship would facilitate the ever deeper exploration of intimacy. Though often sexual, K/S fiction would be better viewed as intimatising, rather than sexualising, its source, for within its stories sex is just one, particularly vivid, way of exploring intimacy. Academics, Lamb and Veith suggest that so called 'first time' stories are popular because 'women in western culture are socialised not to initiate sexual relationships and thus are intrigued by the problem of moving a relationship beyond the plateau of camaraderie and deep friendship'.<sup>64</sup> In fact I think it more likely that these stories are popular (and they are so popular that there are currently 56 volumes of the compilation zine *First Time* which only publishes such stories) because within them sex is depicted as the end point of a trajectory of interpersonal intimacy that begins with camaraderie and deep friendship and progresses towards the extreme intimacy of sexual interaction. Many first time stories conclude with images which connote more intimacy than physicality. This is illustrated by the following quotations which

<sup>62</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.190.

<sup>63</sup> Fern, *Inside the Mind*, p.100.

<sup>64</sup> Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth', p.246.

are from the conclusions to the stories in the zine *First Time 30*; similar quotations could be found in almost any K/S zine:

1. Spock to Kirk: 'I have dreamed of having you in my bed and [...]in my mind.'
2. 'His [Spock's] mind reached out to Kirk's. He was not surprised to discover they fit together as perfectly as the pieces of a puzzle.'
3. Spock to Kirk: "I'm glad you finally found..." The dark eyes dropped to their sweaty bodies and Spock smiled. "... the words to express that love."
4. 'They awoke and considered with wonder their new being. The closeness, the utter certainty of love, the presence of his lover within each cell, each part of his being.'
5. 'This time, he took Spock, and he knew at last that the Vulcan was truly his.'
6. 'The two drifted in their own private universe.'<sup>65</sup>

Although not all these stories contain explicit sexual descriptions, they all imply that the intimacy achieved is a direct result of the mutual realisation of erotic attraction. Although many of these quotations contain physical and erotic cues, ('in my bed', 'sweaty bodies', 'took') they are always paralleled by intimate images, ('in my mind', 'closeness', 'private universe') and the stories conclude on a note of intimacy achieved, intimacy which transcends and even displaces the sexual as the central defining principle of the heroes' relationship. It is not the act of sex which is glorified in these stories, but the intimacy it engenders and in this way K/S, like other intimatopic fiction, reflects ideologies of moderated eroticism. In K/S, sex is simply one of many creative tools for exploring intimacy. It is this intimacy, found in *Star Trek* and re-encoded in K/S, that attracts many fans. As Linda describes her own interest in K/S, 'if there was no relationship between two characters on screen I wouldn't be remotely interested in reading slash about them. It was because of the friendship between Kirk and Spock, that seemed so intense on screen, that I became interested in reading K/S.'<sup>66</sup> For Linda the sexual stories of K/S fiction would be uninteresting if it

<sup>65</sup> Judith Coventry, 'Fantasy's Fire', *First Time*, 30 (1991), 4-17 (p.17); Karla Kelly, 'The puzzle' *First Time*, 30 (1991), 18-24 (p.24); Elizabeth Kay and Lynn Thomas, 'Humbug', *First Time*, 30 (1991), 26-51 (p.51); Penny Wise, 'Measure of Friendship', *First Time*, 30 (1991), 52-60 (p.60); Anne McClean, 'The oldest Story', *First Time*, 30 (1991), 62-99 (p.97); Telana Wells, 'Catnip', *First Time*, 30 (1991), 100-113 (p.113) [fanzine].

<sup>66</sup> Linda, Kirk Spock Heaven, 18 October 04.

were not for the intimacy they appropriate and re-encode. Even the history of K/S fiction points to the fact that its roots are in intimate antecedents, for K/S evolved from intimate KandS fiction rather than from the sexually explicit heterosexual fan fiction which was also popular in the early 1970s. Indeed, despite the occasional heated debate between K/S and KandS fans, as Verba points out in her book detailing the history of *Star Trek* zines, 'the similarities in the two genres are too numerous to ignore,'<sup>67</sup> that one is sexual and one is not is less important than that both are intimate, and many K/S fans enjoy both K/S and KandS fan fiction.

One of the similarities between intimate KandS fiction and erotic and intimate K/S fiction is their mutual use of hurt/comfort, indeed I appropriated this term from the fan fiction communities. Joanna Russ describes hurt/comfort in K/S as combining 'a lot of open sexual touching and strong emotional intimacy'<sup>68</sup> from this description it is easy to see how well such a structure fits with the fans' interest in combining intimate, emotional and sexual imagery. The K/S community interprets elements of hurt/comfort embodied in the *Star Trek* narrative as signs of interpersonal intimacy, much as Susan Hill and Pat Barker interpret similar elements appropriated from World War One sources. Indeed when I asked fans to suggest specific scenes that they found 'slashy' over half of those nominated were ones in which Kirk or Spock had suffered mentally or physically and the other offered, often physical, comfort. As Henry Jenkins describes it 'structures like hurt/comfort are in the text [*Star Trek*] and are then explored and re-written by fans in more elaborate ways,'<sup>69</sup> ways which make them increasingly private and intimate. Alayne Gelfand's short story 'The Edge of Reason' begins by appropriating a scene from *Star Trek* in which Spock is blinded. Although in *Star Trek* Spock is saved by his third eyelid, in Gelfand's re-encoding he remains blind and is depicted as 'small and vulnerable'.<sup>70</sup> His vulnerability is steadily increased as treatment fails and eventually facilitates Kirk's comfort which serves to break down the barriers between them. When Spock is hopeless, still blind and catatonic, his hands scared from a suicide

<sup>67</sup> Verba, *Boldly Writing*, p.24.

<sup>68</sup> Russ, *Magic Mommas*, p.87.

<sup>69</sup> 'Appendix A: An Interview with Henry Jenkins' in *Enterprise Zones*, pp.259-278 (p.275).

<sup>70</sup> Gelfand, 'The Edge of Certainty', *As I do Thee*, (1984) 92-122 (p.96) [fanzine].

attempt, Kirk is finally able to insist that 'you can't run from love because it's inside you. You're inside me, Spock, I can't run and neither can you.'<sup>71</sup> As Kirk keeps emphasising, Spock is so physically and emotionally vulnerable that he has no choice but to accept Kirk's comfort and admit his own 'need'.<sup>72</sup> In a gesture more intimate than any offered by *Star Trek* 'Kirk smoothed back the onyx hair, caressed one damp cheek soothingly'.<sup>73</sup> In this story, which gradually progresses toward mutual sexual interaction, the hurt and its concurrent comfort function in rather the same way as sex, as yet another creative tool for exploring intimacy, enabling the characters to combine physicality with intimacy and to overcome their inhibitions. As Spock accepts his comforter he finally admits 'I need friendship...yes and love! Jim, I need you!'<sup>74</sup> The use of hurt/comfort to facilitate an eroticised intimacy highlights how, within intimatopic communities, any and all structures will be appropriated for the intimate potential they contain. If K/S writers were only interested in the sexual relationship they encoded between Kirk and Spock surely they would reject hurt/comfort in favour of direct sexual expression? Instead they frequently use it, despite the fact that, whilst it legitimates male/male touching, hurt/comfort is a difficult medium to connect to sexual interaction; after all, as Keegan's texts have already highlighted, sex is not always possible, or even desirable, in cases of injury or illness.

Hurt/comfort, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter (p.148), is also of use to the intimatopic writer for its facilitation of face-to-face communication. As an appropriative source, *Star Trek* resonates particularly strongly with the intimatopic community's interest in face-to-face communication; indeed, *Star Trek* itself often used elements of hurt/comfort to facilitate emotional communication between its male heroes. For instance in the episode entitled 'The Naked Time' the crew of the Enterprise catch a virus which dissolves inhibitions and, as a result, confess to each other their emotional secrets. Significantly to K/S fans, Kirk and Spock divulge their secrets only to each other. K/S readers and writers perceive this level of communication between men, however induced, to be unusual and interpret its privatisation of the homosocial as a sign of

<sup>71</sup> Gelfand, 'The Edge of Certainty', p.110.

<sup>72</sup> Gelfand, 'The Edge of Certainty', p.110.

<sup>73</sup> Gelfand, 'The Edge of Certainty', p.112.

<sup>74</sup> Gelfand, 'The Edge of Certainty', p.112.



interpersonal intimacy. As one fan Gilda puts it, 'in our culture men are not allowed to express intimacy, so I like it when I see it. Here [in *Star Trek*] are two men who *can* express intimacy.'<sup>75</sup> That this unusually open communication is central to the K/S community's interpretation of intimacy is reflected by the survey I conducted in which the fact that 'Kirk and Spock share their emotions and feelings' is one of the highest ranking reasons for the erotic potential that K/S fans see in *Star Trek*. Within the K/S community the centrality of face-to-face communication, across both source and re-encoding, can be connected to elements of gender blending which are similarly distributed across the source and the appropriation. As Gilda noticed, and as I have already mentioned (p.94), face-to-face communication is considered a feminine, rather than masculine, style of interaction. It is perhaps this alongside other 'feminine' elements of Kirk and Spock's personalities, such as Kirk's 'emotional' nature, and Spock's role of 'alien, other, outsider,'<sup>76</sup> which helps to create the intimacy which so draws the K/S community to these characters. One fan, Mary, certainly thinks this is the case, for she feels that, 'the blurring of traditional gender roles in the original series actually helped to create K/S[...]it was a factor in leading many of us to think about Kirk and Spock as potential lovers in the first place.'<sup>77</sup> In their gender blended characterisations Kirk and Spock are similar to many of the other appropriated heroes already considered in this thesis, for instance Rivers, Sassoon, Alexander and Bagoas, whose gender blending characteristics appeared to draw intimatopic writers and to facilitate the intimacy of their texts.

The gender blending which is re-encoded into K/S fiction has been commented on by many academics, for instance Joanna Russ who writes that, 'responsibility, initiative, activity, passivity, strength [and] weakness shift constantly from one to the other.'<sup>78</sup> In line with this perspective, Bacon Smith writes that in K/S 'each character takes up some of the masculine role and some of the feminine role'.<sup>79</sup> She also accurately connects this to the depiction of emotion, adding in her later book that the heroes are 'feminised to access a

<sup>75</sup> Gilda, personal communication, 24 May 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth', p.243.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Sweeney, personal communication, 6 November 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Russ, *Magic Mommas*, p.83.

<sup>79</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.250.



greater degree of feeling'.<sup>80</sup> Constance Penley takes a slightly different approach, insisting that despite mixed gender roles, Kirk and Spock are 'clearly meant to be male' in K/S fiction.<sup>81</sup> I agree with Penley's point, that the majority of K/S fans are trying to write convincingly male characters; at least in the intimatopic world of K/S, where a man can have feminine characteristics and still be considered masculine. Many K/S fans enjoy their fiction for its mixed gender roles; as Kathy points out it is 'the nature of the "equality," the balancing of the dynamics, between Kirk and Spock that is so appealing'.<sup>82</sup> Indeed the 'depiction of equality between Kirk and Spock' ranks as the 4<sup>th</sup> most important element in K/S fiction. However, despite the obvious importance of images of gender equality<sup>83</sup> and although gender blending is a feature of both the source and the appropriative fiction, I do not believe that, as Lamb and Veith rather optimistically suggest, K/S removes 'romantic love from the arena of gender discourse altogether'<sup>84</sup> nor that, as Russ claims, K/S is 'free of the culture's whole discourse of gender and sex roles'.<sup>85</sup> Far from being free from gender discourse and sex role stereotyping, I believe K/S and other intimatopic fiction relies upon them. Gender blending is only salient (or even possible) in an environment where, for instance, emotional distance is considered a masculine attribute and emotional openness a feminine one; if gender blended texts could really be free from such constructs they would become invisible and unremarkable. Thus even though intimatopic texts offer alternative ideologies, they also rely on hegemonic paradigms. Although most fans would not consider it in such a light, the gender blending that K/S fiction encodes might be considered 'performative', in that it enacts gender by making oblique citations to conventional masculinity and femininity. Like many performative acts however, it is unable to elude the binaries to which it refers and as such can be considered neither an upholder of 'discursive power' nor as 'the means of its subversion'.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Bacon Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, p.113.

<sup>81</sup> Penley, 'Brownian Motion', p.154.

<sup>82</sup> Kathy, Kirk Spock Heaven, 3 March 2004.

<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the issue of equality in intimatopic texts see conclusion p.224

<sup>84</sup> Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth', p.241.

<sup>85</sup> Russ, *Magic Mommas*, p.89.

<sup>86</sup> Carla Kaplan, *The Erotics of Talk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.158.

K/S fiction, like other intimatopic texts shows a commitment to reciprocity on both a mental and physical plane. *Star Trek* offers the appropriative reader the 'mind meld', a joining of minds enabled by Vulcan telepathy which is the ultimate in face-to-face communication and mental reciprocity. Although overtly non sexual the mind meld, which *Star Trek* commentator April Shelley describes as the 'fleshless' 'marriage of true minds',<sup>87</sup> is certainly intimate in the extreme. As Constance Penley highlights, it allows Kirk and Spock 'to communicate more intimacy than today's men are thought to do'.<sup>88</sup> Several academics have suggested that the 'psychological intimacy' and 'emotional bond',<sup>89</sup> which *Star Trek* encodes between Kirk and Spock, with the help of structures like the mind meld and hurt/comfort, 'inspired' or even 'spawned' K/S.<sup>90</sup> Given the clear resonance between the mind meld and the intimatopic community's interest in face-to-face communication and mental reciprocity it is no surprise that the mind meld ranks seventh amongst the reasons why K/S fans see *Star Trek* as slashy and that 'emotional sharing' ranks first and 'images of oneness' eleventh in the list of issues which fans feel are of importance to K/S fiction. Killa, one of the most popular K/S writers in recent years, helps explain why the mind meld is one of the more attractive possibilities within K/S fiction: 'that you could be so intimate with someone and still love and trust them is more affecting than any traditional idea of "romance."'<sup>91</sup> From their intimatopic perspective, K/S fans interpret the intimacy of the mind meld as deeply erotic and as such it becomes a central part of the sexual intimatopias that they create. Killa's own short story 'Surrender' for instance depicts the moment when, joined in the mind meld, her heroes reach orgasm thus: 'He was Kirk. He was Spock. They were one'<sup>92</sup> the context clearly connecting mental and physical reciprocity. Della Van Hise's novel *A Question of Balance* also interprets and re-encodes the mind meld as erotic for both human and Vulcan. For Spock 'the thought of melding with him [Kirk] nearly overwhelmed him with desire' and for

<sup>87</sup> April Shelley, "'I have Been and Ever Shall Be Your Friend": *Star Trek*, The Deerslayer and the American Romance', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20 (1986), 84-104 (p.96).

<sup>88</sup> Penley, 'Brownian Motion', p.156.

<sup>89</sup> Chris Gregory, *Star Trek: Parallel Narratives* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.148; Mary Buhl Dulta, 'Very Bad Poetry Captain: Shakespeare in *Star Trek*', *Extrapolation*, 36 (1995), 38-45 (p.45).

<sup>90</sup> Gregory, *Star Trek* p.148; Dulta, 'Very Bad Poetry', p.45.

<sup>91</sup> Killa, Kirk Spock Heaven, 17 September 2004.

<sup>92</sup> Killashandra, *Surrender* on-line <<http://seacouver.slashcity.net/killasurrend.html>>

Kirk, just the characteristic gesture, established by *Star Trek*, of the fingers placed on the face to initiate the mind meld becomes an erotic trigger, an 'intimate touch[...]bearing the promise of ecstasy'.<sup>93</sup> The way that K/S appropriates the image of the mind meld is a perfect example of what Jenkins describes as its shift in focus 'from action adventure onto character relationships'.<sup>94</sup> Only ever used in a professional capacity in *Star Trek*, the intimacy of the mind meld forms a central part of the erotics of K/S fiction. Once again it is possible to align K/S with a range of intimatopic texts which, as Camille Bacon Smith says of other slash fandoms, also 'receive the mind meld treatment, with references to "almost telepathic" rapport'.<sup>95</sup> Intimatopic texts characteristically use these images of rapport to showcase their ideological commitment to mental and physical unity and the mind meld is recontextualised in K/S fiction in this ideological role. In the erotic world of K/S the mind meld also informs the community's interest in moderated eroticism in which, as Lamb and Veith describe it, 'sexual experience is transcended by the psychic union it engenders'.<sup>96</sup> Reflecting the intertwined ideologies of mental and physical reciprocity and moderated eroticism, fans describe the erotics of K/S as 'romantic, almost spiritual' indeed 'more of a spiritual thing than a physical one'. With its 'stories which focus more on naked spirits than naked bodies', it depicts 'the touching of hearts and souls and perhaps even minds'.<sup>97</sup>

The private and homosocial nature of the mental and physical union which is implied by the mind meld in K/S fiction hints at the community's interest in appropriating and re-encoding images of exclusivity. It must already be apparent that *Star Trek* as a source suggests a certain amount of emotional exclusivity between Kirk and Spock, an exclusivity which K/S fans read as a sign of potentially erotic intimacy. K/S fans point to the fact that Kirk and Spock's 'greatest commitments' seem to be to one another as the number one reason why *Star Trek* seems slashy to them. Other elements which seem slashy to the K/S

<sup>93</sup> Van Hise, *A Question of Balance*, p.28, p.34. [fanzine].

<sup>94</sup> Henry Jenkins ' "At Other Times Like Females" Gender and Star Trek Fan Fiction', in *Science Fiction Audiences*, pp.196-212 (p.197).

<sup>95</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.231.

<sup>96</sup> Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth', p.249.

<sup>97</sup> Gilda, Kirk Spock Heaven 16 September 2004; anon - quoted by Jenna, Kirk Spock Heaven 12 March 2001; Kale, *Charisma* 15; Ivy, Kirk Spock Heaven 19 September 2004.

community, such as 'emotional dependency', the fact that Kirk and Spock 'seem jealous of each other's other relationships' and that 'Neither Kirk nor Spock have a steady girlfriend or wife' but rather 'always end up together despite temporary love interests', also suggest exclusivity. The last two in particular suggest that K/S fans see signs of exclusivity and intimacy in what Chris Gregory describes as a one of 'the conventions of a 1960s TV series which demanded that the hero should always be able to have new romances'.<sup>98</sup> It is not surprising that, within the intimatopic community, these temporary heterosexual romances, which for the most part depicted sexual attraction in the absence of intimacy, seemed of far less salience than the emotional bond connecting Kirk and Spock. Indeed these emotionally shallow romances are seen as direct evidence of a deeper connection existing between Kirk and Spock for as fan writer Della Van Hise points out, 'when those heroes couldn't find their happiness in the arms of their one episode lovers[...]K/S became a logical conclusion in the minds of many writers and viewers.'<sup>99</sup> It is perhaps ironic that in this case, the temporary romances, intended to bolster the heroes' heterosexual status,<sup>100</sup> have become part of an interpretation of same sex intimacy. Intimatopic readers and writers have, as the previous chapters have already suggested, a particular interest in depicting intense relationships in which the intimacy is exclusive to those who share it (see p.116). For these interpreters the way that *Star Trek* encodes its two heroes as isolated individuals, privatises the homosocial bond they share. *Star Trek* offers the appropriative reader the image of Kirk, isolated by his role as captain, confiding to Spock that he is just 'a young and lonely man'.<sup>101</sup> Spock's half Vulcan breeding similarly marks him as outsider; he has left his native planet and is estranged from his Vulcan father.<sup>102</sup> Spock, as his mother points out to Kirk, is 'neither Human, nor Vulcan, at home nowhere [...] except Starfleet'.<sup>103</sup> Separated from their contemporaries, Kirk and Spock develop ties of intimacy between them, and in the final aired episode of *Star Trek* Kirk tells Spock that he is

<sup>98</sup> Gregory, *Star Trek*, p.167.

<sup>99</sup> Della Van Hise, 'K/S a Personal Experience', *Naked Times*, 10 (1986). [fanzine]

<sup>100</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 1995). Dyer suggests that in so called buddy movies 'women have no function other than to signal the men's heterosexuality' p.127.

<sup>101</sup> From: 'Requiem for Methuselah'. Written by Jerome Bixby, directed by Murray Golden, 1969.

<sup>102</sup> From: 'Journey to Babel'. Written by D.C. Fontana, directed by Joseph Pevney, 1967

<sup>103</sup> From: 'Journey to Babel'. Written by D.C. Fontana, directed by Joseph Pevney, 1967



'closer to [him] the Captain than anyone in the universe'.<sup>104</sup> For K/S fans the professional homosocial bonds which were strengthened by *Star Trek's* depiction of social isolation are interpreted as signs of personal and private intimacy. Indeed, fan writer Killa mentions that 'another thing that really touched me about the Kirk-Spock friendship [on *Star Trek*] [...] was the loyalty and uniqueness of it. The idea that Spock was unique (and therefore alone) until he met Kirk, who just didn't see the barriers between them.'<sup>105</sup> Rather like Pat Barker's interpretation of World War One (p.96), and Renault's interpretation of Plato's dialogues (p.64-65), Killa's interpretation of *Star Trek* works towards privatising homosocial bonds. Beginning with the facts of 'loyalty' and social isolation, Killa re-encodes these homosocial images as signs of an intense and private intimacy in which there are no 'barriers' between individuals.

### **Different Folks, Different Strokes: Other Interpretations of *Star Trek* as Homoerotic**

The K/S fans are far from the only community to interpret *Star Trek* in [homo]erotic terms, however their intimatopic interpretations are distinctly different from those offered by other interpretive communities. Intimatopic interpretations of *Star Trek* will always draw on intimate cues to support their erotic re-encodings, however academic critical readings of *Star Trek* draw on a variety of different cues to support their analyses of homoeroticism. Thus despite the superficially similar end point the academic readings of *Star Trek* as homoerotic offered by Elyce Helford, Ilsa Bick and Sara Gwenllian Jones (amongst others) cannot be considered in the same light as intimatopic interpretations. Helford's understanding of the 'homoerotic implications' of the Kirk - Spock relationship is based solely on her reading of gendered roles which, she claims, 'make it easy and tempting to read Kirk as "husband" to Spock's "wife."'<sup>106</sup> Though, as I have shown, K/S fans do draw on gender in their erotic re-encodings of intimacy, rather than concentrating on the power relations that

<sup>104</sup> From: 'Turnabout Intruder' Teleplay by Arthur H Singer, Story By Gene Roddenberry, Directed by Herb Wallerstein, 1969.

<sup>105</sup> Killa, Kirk Spock Heaven, 17 September 2004.

<sup>106</sup> Elyce Rae Helford, ' "A Part of Myself no Man Should Ever see" Reading Captain Kirk's Multiple Masculinities', in *Enterprise Zones*, pp.11-31 (p.21).



fascinate Helford, fans are more inclined to interpret the relationship as one of equality and, as such, to set it apart from the heterosexual binary of Husband and Wife.<sup>107</sup> Ilsa Bick, takes a Freudian approach in her claim that sexual attraction between Kirk and Spock is 'already present in the [Star trek] narratives'.<sup>108</sup> Bick claims that Kirk and Spock constantly reproduce latency stage behaviour and adds that violence is the only way in which 'homoeerotic elements can be consciously expressed'.<sup>109</sup> This is almost the opposite approach to the intimatopic one, as here Bick, through Freud, is able to read a lack of intimacy as a sign of erotic attraction. Gwenllian Jones takes a queer approach to her argument that an erotic attraction can be seen between Kirk and Spock simply by extending 'narrative logics into the realm of sexuality'.<sup>110</sup> Cult television is she claims, 'already "queer"' with its "'contra-straight logics'" in which heterosexuality must be avoided to avoid mundanity.<sup>111</sup> In contrast to the K/S fans who are 'slashing' the character interaction, Jones' approach is one of queering cult television. Jones' interpretation is one which focuses on the unorthodox cultural cues offered by the logistics of the adventure series; K/S fans however put more focus on the ambiguous cues offered by character interaction. Although these cues might be a result of television conventions, the fans rarely mention these external factors. As fan writer and zine editor Jenna describes it, 'K/Sers are utterly devoted to the \*characters\* first and to the social condition of slash second'.<sup>112</sup> Each individual will interpret *Star Trek* by selecting cues appropriate to the paradigms privileged within their own interpretive communities; Helford's paradigm is feminism and hence she selects gender and power cues; Bick's paradigm is Freudian psychology and so she focuses on the unconscious motivations of the scripts; Jones's paradigm is a queer one and hence she is drawn to unorthodox anti-heterosexual cues; only K/S fans from their intimatopic perspective draw specifically on the intimacy of ambiguous

<sup>107</sup> For instance Kathy writes: 'The nature of the "equality," the balancing of the dynamics, between Kirk & Spock is what is so appealing (for me) about this relationship, as opposed to a "typical" male-female relationship (though I know there's no such thing as "typical").' (Kathy, Kirk Spock Heaven 3 March 2004). And other fans claim that 'it's the equality of the relationship' that draws them to K/S (Quotation from anonymous response to survey)

<sup>108</sup> Bick, 'Boys in Space', p.190.

<sup>109</sup> Bick, 'Boys in Space', p.203.

<sup>110</sup> Gwenllian Jones, 'Sex Lives', p.81.

<sup>111</sup> Gwenllian Jones, 'Sex Lives', p.90.

<sup>112</sup> Jenna, Kirk Spock Heaven 11 February 2004.

cues. That these interpretations are radically different, my chart clearly demonstrates.



*Star Trek* itself I have positioned as ambiguous, it contains a number of erotic cues in the realm of connotation and offers numerous intimate cues. Helford's feminist interpretation enhances the eroticism of the ambiguous cues surrounding the gendered roles taken by Kirk and Spock; her re-encoding leaves the level of intimacy relatively untouched whilst highlighting the salience of erotic connotation. Bick's interpretation uses Freudian analysis to read erotic potential in a range of cues, she re-encodes the relationship as unconsciously sexual, but her reading of *Star Trek*, which mentions the heroes 'each literally beating the other', minimises its intimate cues. Jones' re-encoding is hard to position at all on this chart, designed as it is to explore intimatopic re-encodings with their internal textual focus; however she draws on external cultural cues and re-encodes *Star Trek* as queer, hence sexual, whilst largely ignoring the internal issue of interpersonal intimacy. The interpretations of K/S fans, typical of intimatopic re-encodings, enhance intimate cues whilst adding erotic ones.

As the four approaches to interpreting the Kirk - Spock relationship as erotic, the feminist, the Freudian, the queer and the intimatopic all differ radically in their ideological and interpretive focus it will be apparent how hard it might be for one of these practitioners to appreciate the route taken by the others. Indeed the difficulty of adequately accounting for some of the critical re-encodings, using the chart designed to discuss intimatopic re-encodings, shows how the intimatopic perspective is limited in its ability to explicate other

approaches, and, as I shall demonstrate, other approaches are equally inadequate for contextualising intimatopic interpretations. The mismatch between the interpretive paradigms of the analyst and the ideologies of the object of analysis has significantly affected academic attempts to understand K/S literature in its own context. Any literary critic must either examine a text in its own context,<sup>113</sup> in the case of K/S this would be the interpretive practice of the K/S community, or they must impose their own ideologies on the text and, if there is a discrepancy, claim that they are able to offer textual insights which, either through the workings of the unconscious or simple naivety, are unavailable to the fans themselves.<sup>114</sup> In the case of K/S fiction a good example of the gap between interpretive ideologies and interpreted object is offered by Stephen Maddison's queer reading. Maddison interprets K/S as a 'radical manoeuvre' which ultimately fails in political terms because it 'de-naturalises gay sex acts' and fails to see the possibilities in 'lesbian alternatives'.<sup>115</sup> Although this provides a very interesting insight into how K/S is perceived within the queer community it tells us very little about the internal ideologies of K/S fiction itself. Maddison describes K/S in terms of power structures, emphasising how it 'enables a [...]narrative punishment of "straight men"' (such as Kirk) when 'the fucking tables are turned on them' and they themselves get fucked which, he adds, 'makes an unfortunate correlation between 'passive' gay sexuality and humiliation'.<sup>116</sup> I hope that it is already apparent how ideologically at odds Maddison's reading of K/S is with that of the average K/S fan. Most members of this intimatopic community would be astounded to see their literature interpreted through a paradigm in which sex is refigured as humiliation and punishment rather than the ultimate expression of intimacy. Far from punishing men for their heterosexuality, the homoerotic relationship in K/S is encoded as reward. As one anonymous respondent claimed when asked why she wrote K/S, 'I wanted to

<sup>113</sup> As Alan Sinfield points out 'the writer is not distinct from society'. Alan Sinfield, *Society and Literature 1945-1970* (London: Methuen, 1983), p.3.

<sup>114</sup> This latter approach is particularly common in criticism of the popular romance where for instance Janice Radway and Tania Modleski both claim insights unavailable to the producers and readers of the texts in question. Janice Radway, *Reading The Romance: Women Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London: Verso, 1987); Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance* (London: Routledge, 1990)

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Maddison, *Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters: Gender Dissent and Heterosocial Bonds in Gay Culture* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.100

<sup>116</sup> Maddison, *Fags, Hags*, p.101.



make Spock happy.’<sup>117</sup> Readings of K/S which do not emphasise the intimacy of the literature, whilst they may usefully describe the implications of K/S within various other interpretive communities, fail to understand it in its own context, within which the intimate is read as erotic and the erotic is depicted as intimate.

As I have already suggested, the majority of critical interpretations of K/S focus on the sexual cues it offers; Maddison is particularly interested in who’s on top, Penley is fascinated by its subversive potential as a female sexual utopia, Joanna Russ characterises it as pornography and Andrew Ross describes it as ‘always graphically sexual’.<sup>118</sup> Although not all critical readings are as insensitive to the intimacy of K/S as these quotations imply,<sup>119</sup> many interpretations, and certainly all those quoted above, divorce the erotic and intimate images which K/S so crucially unites across the cultural faultline that separates them. Many texts, theoretical as well as fictional, which work to connect the two sides of this faultline have, I believe, suffered from ideological misunderstandings which have sexualised their ideologies of intimacy. The ease with which this may happen is illustrated by Rich’s theoretical model of the lesbian continuum, through which Rich aimed to connected female ‘lovers’ with female ‘comrades’, ‘co-workers’ and ‘community’.<sup>120</sup> Rich wished to expand the common conception of eroticism beyond physicality to embrace other levels of intimacy. However in an exchange of letters between her and her editors, the editors point out that ‘the metaphor of the lesbian continuum is open to all kinds of misunderstandings’ for instance that ‘lesbianism and female friendship become exactly the same thing’.<sup>121</sup> The claim that Rich was making, that lesbianism and friendship can both be interpreted as intimacy, gets lost in the fear that friendship will become sexualised, or that lesbianism will be denied its sexual component; both these possibilities revolve around a fear of eradicating the faultline separating the intimate and the sexual. Although modern literary criticism offers a few examples of intimate texts which have been desexualised

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<sup>117</sup> Anonymous response to the survey question ‘why do you write/read K/S?’

<sup>118</sup> Maddison, *Fag, Hags*; Penley, ‘Brownian Motion’; Russ, *Magic Mommas*; Ross, *No Respect*, p.256

<sup>119</sup> Lamb and Veith, ‘Romantic Myth’ and Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*.

<sup>120</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p.27.

<sup>121</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry*, p.69, p.70.

as a result of the desire to separate the intimate from the sexual,<sup>122</sup> it is more common that intimacy becomes sexualised. Once a text has been sexualised in this way it becomes, as Monique Wittig warns, 'univocal',<sup>123</sup> it says one thing only and that one thing is 'sex'. Sadly in the case of K/S and other sexual, or ambiguous, intimatopic texts that one word is woefully reductive. Univocal sexual interpretations fail to account for the multiple sites of intimacy that take their place alongside the erotic in intimatopic texts. Once sex has become the single voice of any one text it may co-opt even ambiguous elements of that text, for 'connotation', as D.A. Miller points out, attempts to 'recruit every signifier of the text'.<sup>124</sup> This kind of textual sexualising is particularly common when the author of an ambiguous text is known to be homosexual,<sup>125</sup> but it might also occur if the author of an ambiguous text is seen to have connections to a genre which, like K/S, is often perceived as being graphically sexual. To illustrate this possibility I would now like to discuss the case history of an ambiguous text by the K/S writer Della Van Hise, the fervour over which highlights how sexually focused ideologies can both hijack ambiguous sources and fail to account for the intimacy of intimatopic texts.

### The Sexualisation of Intimacy

Like Mel Keegan, Della Van Hise is a writer who has published in both professional and amateur contexts. Van Hise was a prolific writer of K/S fiction for many years, her amateur output peaking in the early to mid eighties and indeed several quotations from her amateur works have already informed earlier sections of this chapter. As a professional writer Van Hise wrote the *Star Trek* novel, *Killing Time*, which is part of the on going series of professionally

<sup>122</sup> I am thinking of Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Women's Press, 1985), which has been criticised for de-sexualising love between women. Alison Oram, 'Telling Stories about the Ladies of Llangollen: The Construction of Lesbian and Feminist Histories', in *Re-Presenting the past: Women and History*, ed. by Anne Marie Gallagher (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp.44-62.

<sup>123</sup> Monique Wittig, 'The Point of View: Universal or Particular?', *Feminist Issues*, 3 (1983) 63-69 (p.65).

<sup>124</sup> D.A. Miller, 'Anal Rope', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.119-141 (p.125).

<sup>125</sup> I am thinking particularly of, George Piggford, *Queer Forster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997) and Byrne Fone, *Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press: 1992).



produced novels marketed by Pocket Books.<sup>126</sup> These novels, though they are 'produced as officially licensed books by Paramount',<sup>127</sup> are not considered as part of the official *Star Trek* canon despite the fact that they must adhere to a strict set of guidelines.<sup>128</sup> Although Van Hise had written many K/S stories and novels *Killing Time* is not one of them. Instead it fits into the established pattern of professionally published *Star Trek* novels, many of which are, like their source, both homosocial and ambiguous. Van Hise has thus written sexual intimatopias, as an amateur writer, and an ambiguous intimatopia, as a professional writer. First published in 1985, *Killing Time* was withdrawn when the editors were told that the author was involved in the amateur world of K/S fiction. The exact story behind the publication and subsequent withdrawal of *Killing Time* has been retold so many times, by so many people, each of whom alters it to suit their own agenda, that it is hard to piece together the actual events; however, my version, as follows, undoubtedly has some validity.<sup>129</sup>

All manuscripts accepted by Pocket Books as potential *Star Trek* novels must be edited both by Pocket Books and by the *Star Trek* experts at Paramount. This process involves the circulation of several versions of the manuscript which are recombined during the final line editing process. Following the acceptance of her novel, Van Hise was sent an edited manuscript and accepted all the changes which it suggested; apparently they were very minor. However, when this edited manuscript was returned to Pocket Books some bureaucratic confusion resulted in the unedited version being sent to the typesetter. Thus the version of *Killing Time* originally published in 1985 had not in fact undergone any editing at all. It seems that this error would never have come to light if it were not for the fact that somebody who knew of Van Hise's involvement with the K/S community chose to complain to Paramount, insisting that there were 'homosexual overtones' to *Killing Time*. Paramount duly investigated and found that the minor editorial changes originally suggested by them had not been incorporated into the

<sup>126</sup> Pocket Books are connected to Paramount who own the rights to *Star Trek* publications.

<sup>127</sup> Lincoln Geraghty, 'Homosocial Desire on the Final Frontier: Kinship, The American romance, and *Deep Space Nine*'s "Erotic Triangles"', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 36 (2003), 441-465 (p.464).

<sup>128</sup> This writers guide can be found on line <[www.members.aol.com/pinkworld/trekguid.htm](http://www.members.aol.com/pinkworld/trekguid.htm)>.

<sup>129</sup> I have based my account largely on my personal communication with Della Van Hise. I wrote to her to seek permission to discuss her work both professional and amateur and asked for her version of events. All quotations are from personal communication received 4 February 2004.

printed version. Paramount then complained to Pocket Books who recalled the book for re-editing. Pocket Books also contacted Van Hise, claiming that 'there were elements of homosexuality between Kirk and Spock' in the manuscript that was originally submitted. Thus the first edition of *Killing Time* issued early in 1985 was re-edited, presumably by one of the editors at either Pocket Books or Paramount, without Van Hise's knowledge or creative input.<sup>130</sup> The re-edited second edition of *Killing Time* was re-issued later in the year of 1985 and no official mention has since been made of the existence of the first edition. The interesting thing is that, because *Killing Time*, even in its original version, is an ambiguous text, in fact it contained no 'homosexuality' at all. Instead it seems that the novel, which had not been seen as problematic until someone reported that Van Hise spoke from the marginalized position of a K/S fan rather than the authorised position of a *Star Trek* writer, suddenly appeared full of 'elements of homosexuality', indeed it had become univocal.

Although it may have suddenly seemed otherwise to the editors, the original version of *Killing Time* fully complies with the restraints imposed by the official guidelines for potential *Star Trek* novelists which stipulate that: 'we are not interested in books that suggest anything other than friendship among any of the Enterprise crew members.'<sup>131</sup> Although Camille Bacon Smith, who discusses the case of *Killing Time* in some detail, believes that, because the novel is encoded in similar terms to K/S, it sets up a 'homoerotic context,'<sup>132</sup> I disagree; instead I believe *Killing Time* re-encodes *Star Trek* as an ambiguous intimatopia. As I have already mentioned ambiguous intimatopias may share many encoding patterns with sexual ones, but this does not make those ambiguous texts covertly sexual. Van Hise herself insists that she did not write *Killing Time* as a covert K/S novel even though she admits that it might contain some erotic cues via unintentional 'K/S inferences' which, because of her

<sup>130</sup> It is just possible that the editorial changes made to the first editions where those that had been originally suggested and then lost. If this were the case the editorial decisions may not have been made in light of Della's connection to K/S, however they would still serve as an indication of where hegemonic ideologies differ from those of the intimatopic writer.

<sup>131</sup> On line <[www.members.aol.com/pinkworld/trekguid.htm](http://www.members.aol.com/pinkworld/trekguid.htm)>. It is interesting that the guidelines state that they will not consider anything that 'suggests' more than friendship, almost as if the suggestion is worse than the overt description.

<sup>132</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.236.

involvement in the K/S community, were 'incidental' to her 'way of thinking'.<sup>133</sup> Van Hise's 'way of thinking', which combines intimacy and eroticism, is fully in line with the K/S community's intimatopic interpretive practice for she draws a fluid connection between love, friendship and intimacy, replying to those who accuse *Killing Time* of being erotic by asking 'Where do you draw the line between intense friendship and emotional spiritual love? And more importantly why must there be a line in the first place?'<sup>134</sup> 'Where', she asks, does 'Kirk and Spock end and K/S begin?'<sup>135</sup> For Van Hise intense friendship flows smoothly into spiritual love, she appears to wish for an intimatopic space which eradicates the cultural faultline separating the intimate 'Kirk and Spock' and the sexual 'K/S'. However, for the editors at Pocket Books and Paramount, who did not share Van Hise's intimatopic ideologies, when her intimate novel became connected to the sexual K/S it was repositioned on the sexual side of this cultural faultline

It is now common to hear the ambiguous text of *Killing Time* described as if it were K/S fiction; in fact the 'authorized' version of this editorial mix up claims that *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry was incensed to find that 'Pocket Books [...] published a novel with elements of K/S as part of their continuing series of *Star Trek* novels'.<sup>136</sup> What these 'elements of K/S' might actually entail is left distinctly vague, but a look at the editorial changes that Paramount/Pocket Books made to the original manuscript goes some way towards suggesting what they thought K/S might be about and, incidentally, highlights how poorly contextualised their interpretation was. The problem which faced the re-editors of *Killing Time* was to how to remove 'elements of K/S' when, beyond the most salient issue, that it was often sexual in nature, they had very little knowledge of the ideologies of K/S fiction. This lack of context, a lack of knowledge about the interpretive community that produced K/S, meant that despite removing a lot of physical cues the editors failed to make the text any less suggestive to readers familiar with intimatopic ideologies.

<sup>133</sup> Van Hise, 'K/S a Personal Experience'.

<sup>134</sup> Van Hise, 'K/S a Personal Experience'.

<sup>135</sup> Van Hise, 'K/S a Personal Experience'.

<sup>136</sup> Alexander, *Star Trek Creator* p.485/6.

*Killing Time*, involves a complex plot in which the enemy Romulans attempt to discredit the Federation by changing the outcome of crucial historical events. When the original course of 'first history' is changed, the *Star Trek* heroes find themselves suddenly thrust into 'second history', a place in which all their familiar roles are gone. Captain Kirk finds himself a powerless ensign and Spock becomes the captain of a fleet of ships. Our heroes save the Federation partly because they subconsciously recall their previous friendship and are able to band together to undermine the Romulan plot. *Killing Time* is plausible as a *Star Trek* novel partly because the patterns of intimacy it enhances in its re-encoding are familiar from *Star Trek* itself. As Richard Dyer points out, 'audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions that work for them.'<sup>137</sup> It is no surprise then that Van Hise, a K/S fan, chooses to select ambiguous images of intimacy to inform her novel's re-encoding of *Star Trek*, which appropriates and privatises the homosocial, re-encoding it as a sign of specific interpersonal intimacy. As has already been noted, *Star Trek* itself uses the term 'brothers' to refer to Kirk and Spock; in *Star Trek* however this term refers to the optimistic dream of universal brotherhood that they share, a homosocial brotherhood, but not a bond of interpersonal intimacy. In its re-encoding of this ambiguous cue *Killing Time* makes Kirk and Spock 'brothers' because of the exclusive 'telepathic door'<sup>138</sup> that exists between their minds, an image of intimacy which could hardly be more private. In this simple way the intimate image of brotherhood is appropriated to be re-encoded via the image of telepathy which enhances and privatises its apparent intimacy.

Van Hise explains that, to her, one of the most attractive possibilities offered by Kirk and Spock was that 'they actually could blend souls through the mind meld'.<sup>139</sup> Whilst *Star Trek* is the source for the intimate possibilities offered

<sup>137</sup> Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St Martins Press, 1986), p.5.

<sup>138</sup> Della Van Hise, *Killing Time* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p.3. All quotations are from the first edition unless otherwise specified. I have decided to use this edition because I feel that this is the text which most closely reflects the re-encoding of *Star Trek* intended by its author. Further references are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>139</sup> Della Van Hise, personal communication, 4 February 2004.



by the mind meld, in fact it never depicts Kirk and Spock joining mentally except in the line of duty. Despite this Van Hise's novel appropriates the image and co-opts it for intimacy. Van Hise's Spock thinks of the mind melds he has shared with Kirk, both in the professional contexts denoted by *Star Trek*, and the more intimate ones which reflect Van Hise's intimatopic perspective: 'he knew he had seen Kirk's thoughts... many times. He had walked through the layers of consciousness and subconscious ... sharing secrets, healing, befriending. Line of duty ... personal, dual curiosity' (p.168 ellipsis in original). The private and exclusive nature of this telepathic link is made even more prominent within the text of *Killing Time* by Van Hise's re-encoding of social isolation. When Kirk and Spock are isolated in the unfamiliar territory of 'second history' their subconscious memories of each other are the only things which remain 'familiar' (p.33, p.88, p.123, p.169 amongst others). Thus, in a strategy familiar from other intimatopic novels (see p.111 and p.150), Van Hise capitalises on the possibilities for contrasting social isolation with the intimacy her heroes find together. When Kirk recognises Spock as '*Blood brother among the stars. The other half of the whole[...]*' (p.176), whether knowingly or not Van Hise references Platonic ideals in a very similar way to Mary Renault, evoking the same connotations of mental and physical reciprocity inspired by Plato's image of 'making one of two'.<sup>140</sup>

Like other ambiguous intimatopias by Susan Hill and Pat Barker, *Killing Time*'s encoding of the relationship between its two male principals, though ambiguous, demonstrates an engagement with moderated eroticism. Like Barker's *Regeneration* the text is saturated with the ambiguous yet intimate image of the male gaze. On entering the turbo lift one morning Kirk finds Spock 'studying him'. He glances down and away but then looks up again to 'chance a quick look at the Vulcan'. (p.2-3). This look-look away-look back pattern of eye contact is one which, as already mentioned, can connote erotic attraction; however in this case it remains ambiguous because the relationship is defined in social, rather than sexual, terms: Spock is Kirk's 'first officer' and 'his friend' (p.2) and although the two are as close as 'brothers' (p.3), no erotic denotation is

<sup>140</sup> Plato, 'The Symposium', in *Symposium and Phaedrus: Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, ed. by Candace Ward (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), pp.1- 43 (p.17).



offered. As with many ambiguous intimatopic texts the clearest examples of *Killing Time's* moderated eroticism are found in dramatisations of hurt/comfort. When Kirk and Spock outwit the Romulans in 'second history' they must both face death before their original selves can be reunited in 'first history'. Within this containing context their intimacy can be increasingly eroticised: now Spock 'leaned more heavily against Kirk, resting his head on the warm shoulder' (p.293) and Kirk gave him a 'tender smile, moving a little closer, seeking a warmth which seemed to be draining from his own body' (p.293). Erotic cues associated with physical contact are particularly prolific in this scene although, as is typical of the moderated eroticism of the intimatopic text, they are associated with mental, rather than physical rapport, indeed they culminate in the joining of minds rather than of bodies when Kirk 'felt the Vulcan's hand settle on the side of his face, joining their minds together'. (p.294). Within the interpretive community of K/S fandom, to which Van Hise belongs, it is of course these intimate cues, combined as they are with a number of physical ones, which may be read as potentially erotic.

But this is to offer an intimatopic reading of *Killing Time*, and this was not the ideological context through which its re-editors saw it. It is easy to see how, for a reader from the intimatopic community of K/S fans, or indeed from the wider unconnected intimatopic interpretive community, this novel may be read as erotic despite its ambiguity, for within such a context mental and physical unity combining in intimate interpersonal relationships forms part of the erotic landscape. But *Killing Time's* re-editors did not know this; to remove 'elements of K/S' (presumably elements which they thought made the text similar to the erotic texts of K/S) they removed very few of its referents to intimacy, instead they focused on references to physical contact. A comparison of the edited version of *Killing Time* with the original version demonstrates that one of the images most frequently edited out is that of casual touching, especially when that touching is associated with some form of emotion. Although the sentence 'he [Kirk] reached across the table, resting his fingers on his friend's arm' (p.9)<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> The bibliographic details on the second edition are identical to those on the first: 'First Pocket Books science fiction printing, July 1985.' The only way of distinguishing the two editions is either by comparison or by the cover, the first edition has the title in raised lettering. In most

was left unaltered, perhaps because of its overt denotation of friendship, many similar passages are removed, for instance the italicised section of the following: 'Kirk smiled *wistfully*, then *reached out to touch the Vulcan's arm reassuringly* as he remembered the mind fever he'd felt himself.' (p.274) Ironically the reference to physical contact is removed whilst the accompanying reference to mental intimacy is allowed to stay. Time and time again small physical referents are removed whilst the elements of emotional intimacy, that actually make the text slashy, are left to stand. For instance 'The Vulcan reached out tentatively, placing one hand on his captain's shoulder' is removed but the following explanation for the touch, that 'Kirk was the only person on board to whom he could open up' (p.26), is left unaltered. The physical is edited out whilst the intimatopic reference to face-to-face communication stands. It seems that the sexual connotations that the re-editors associated with K/S fiction had indeed, as DA Miller suggested they might, recruited 'every signifier of the text,'<sup>142</sup> for it is not only the physical gestures exchanged between Kirk and Spock which have been removed, but those between the other characters as well. Even the italicised section from the following passage seemed to have become suspect and was removed: 'McCoy moved to the Vulcan's side, *steading him with one arm around the trim waist*, "You weren't out that long," he replied.' (p.155)

The section of *Killing Time* which has been most altered in the re-edited second edition is the climatic scene in which Spock forces a mind meld with Kirk through which he comes to realise that their familiarity to each other in second history stems from their mental intimacy in first history. This scene is encoded in the unedited text as both an act of aggression and one of intimacy, a combination which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, may easily be made to serve intimatopic ideologies. Although Spock uses 'Vulcan strength' (p.174) to force Kirk to mind meld with him, the indirect result of his aggression is that Kirk remembers their intimacy: '*The reassuring touch of an alien hand which was not alien at all. Spock? [...], the other half of the whole*' (p.176). Once their intimacy is rediscovered Kirk forgives Spock his mental and physical trespass, claiming

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cases the pagination is identical, excepting where major revisions have been made. I shall make it clear in the text which edition quotations are from.

<sup>142</sup> Miller, 'Anal Rope', p.125.

that 'if that other universe is real[...]then you had every right to do what you did' (p.177). Thus within the ideologies of *Killing Time* the intimacy attained mitigates against the aggression used to achieve it. As might be expected, a lot of the re-editing of this scene involved removing physical referents. Whereas the original has hands on faces to initiate melds and depicts Spock restraining Kirk by 'covering the ensign's writhing body with his own' (p.173), the edited version removes every instance of physical contact except for the following, 'he [Kirk] found himself falling to the ground, thrown by the Vulcan's arms.' (p.173 second edition). Alongside this, many references to the familiarity uniting Kirk and Spock were also removed. For instance when the meld is first initiated the second edition omits 'he [Kirk] moved instinctively towards the familiar warmth, allowing his thoughts to flow into well known territory' (p.169). This has the effect of making the forced mind meld seem more aggressive as the reader loses the implication that Spock proceeds only because he senses 'that this human's mind had always been open to him' (p.168, first edition only). In the second edition Spock forces the mind meld based on nothing more than his own suspicions and with no confirmation from Kirk of their mental openness to each other. Thus the version in the second edition, whilst it removes the physical cues which may induce people to read the scene as symbolic of rape,<sup>143</sup> also removes many of the references to intimacy that the original text uses to legitimate its aggression. Because of this the second version can look even more like rape than the first, since the act is committed without Kirk's implicit consent, with which he had 'practically asked for the meld' (p.172 first edition only). How successful then was the editorial attempt to, as Michelle Green puts it 'excise homoerotic subtext after an initial printing which included a pseudo-rape scene'?<sup>144</sup> Although the re-editing removed some of the erotic cues associated with physicality the editors' view of what constituted 'homoerotic subtext' or 'elements of K/S' was considerably more physical than that presented by the intimate ideologies of K/S itself. The irony is that because they did not understand the intimate context of K/S the editors failed to remove many 'elements of K/S' and indeed most K/S

<sup>143</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*.

<sup>144</sup> Michelle Erica Green, 'Star Trek: Adventures in time and space', on line <<http://www.littlereview.com/getcritical/tvbooks/taylor.htm>>.

fans still find the resulting text slashy 'because of the 'cliché' in which they [Kirk and Spock] were \*meant\* to be together in any universe'.<sup>145</sup>

The re-editors had focused on the physical markers of intimacy, whilst the K/S primed reader will focus on the mental markers of that intimacy. This is based upon a fundamental difference in how these two reading groups relate friendship and sexual attraction. Like academic critics of *Star Trek*, Wagner and Lundeen, the re-editors have presupposed that 'gay male sexuality [...] [runs] counter to the theme of idealised and spiritualised male friendship that is so central to Trek'.<sup>146</sup> From this perspective they felt that markers of an intimate friendship would be free from erotic inferences, whereas physical cues, even when not particularly intimate, might signal homoeroticism. The idea that physical interaction signals homoerotic attraction is a prevalent one in our culture and, as Nardi points out, many men hold such strong 'prohibitions about homosexuality[...] that ordinary touches [...] are interpreted in homosexual terms'.<sup>147</sup> It seems that the re-editors were working from commonly masculine ideologies under which the move from friendship to sexual love is considered unlikely and physical interaction signals only erotic desire. By contrast K/S fan fiction and *Killing Time* are working from more typically feminine ideologies in which social intimacy and sexual eroticism are deeply linked and both are characterised by physical gestures of affection. The potential difference in masculine and feminine ideological perspective has been discussed by many K/S fans who like Bonita Kale feel that 'Many men don't understand why the Kirk Spock friendship and emotional closeness should be "distorted" into sex [...] But for many women, emotional closeness and sex are two halves of a whole'.<sup>148</sup> And it is not just K/S fans who share these feminine ideologies, for they are shared by the writers of all intimatopic texts, some of which I have considered in detail in this thesis, but many more of which I have not found space to discuss (see appendix two). Indeed, Cicioni's description of what she claims is the central feature of slash fiction in which 'a working partnership' is 'extended into the emotional/sexual sphere' comes close to articulating the central ideological

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<sup>145</sup> Review of *Killing Time* on line <<http://hypatia.slashcity.org/stpb/killingtime.html>>

<sup>146</sup> Wagner and Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time*, p.114.

<sup>147</sup> Nardi, *Men's Friendships*, p.3.

<sup>148</sup> Kale, *Charisma 15*.



concern of all intimatopic texts under which love, friendship and intimacy are fundamentally connected.

### Reading Communities and the Importance of Intimacy

By now there can be little doubt that ideological issues surrounding intimacy connect sexual and ambiguous texts written by both amateur and professional writers and theorists. More than just an esoteric interpretation of *Star Trek*, K/S is one, amateur, part of the larger genre that this thesis has been exploring. Until now, perhaps because of its semi literary status, K/S has generally been understood in one of two ways, either as a unique phenomenon with no connection to existing literature, or as a subspecies of an existing genre, most commonly the popular heterosexual romance. Only by exploring how, rather than how accurately, K/S fans interpret their source and by using this knowledge to explicate the discrete ideologies of the K/S community have I been able to classify K/S where it belongs, as the amateur literature of the intimatopic genre. Academic accounts of K/S and slash fiction which see them as isolated phenomena have, like Sharon Cumberland's, which explores the online slash community, tended to highlight their uniqueness.<sup>149</sup> Although Bacon Smith promisingly claims that 'it would be a mistake to draw too clear a distinction between the commercial fiction writer and the fan writer',<sup>150</sup> she does not touch on the structures shared by amateur and professional writing, and her analysis of fan fiction, which focuses on how it 'works out real life problems and concerns',<sup>151</sup> betrays how differently she perceives amateur and professional writers. Indeed her recent book *Science Fiction Culture* states explicitly that 'the rules of reading'<sup>152</sup> differ for fan produced and professionally produced novels. Whilst Henry Jenkins provides a sympathetic account of K/S fiction in

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<sup>149</sup> Sharon Cumberland, 'Private Uses of Cyberspace: Women, Desire, and Fan Culture' on line <<http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/cumberland.html>> Cumberland's argument, that the internet provided a safe space in which women could legitimately write erotica, is let down by her lack of consideration of the fact that slash fiction was flourishing long before the internet was developed. The idea that slash developed on the internet or that it is primarily disseminated on the internet is a common misconception amongst academics who have not penetrated the thriving print zine communities of many slash fandoms.

<sup>150</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.41.

<sup>151</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.93.

<sup>152</sup> Bacon Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, p.113.



*Textual Poachers* he too often treats K/S not as literature but as a kind of confessional text in which may be read the secret desires of women who long to explore 'alternative modes of masculinity' and express their 'fears about the limitations of contemporary gender roles'.<sup>153</sup> Although Joanna Russ, takes a more literary approach, she too isolates K/S from the mainstream, claiming that it is 'the only sexual fantasy by women for women that is produced without the control or interposition of censorship'.<sup>154</sup> In 1998 Jenkins, Green and Jenkins complained that, 'academic accounts tend to focus on slash's uniqueness',<sup>155</sup> but they did very little themselves to actually elucidate the links to mainstream fiction they wished to highlight.

Academics who have attempted to connect K/S with mainstream fiction have lacked a predefined genre within which to suitably classify it. This difficulty has resulted in a number of compromises, for instance Penley characterises K/S as a 'hybridised genre' part 'romance' part 'pornography' and part 'utopian science fiction'<sup>156</sup> inadvertently suggesting, quite accurately, that K/S does not belong to either the romantic or pornographic genre. Lamb and Veith, whose reading of K/S is one of the most sympathetic to its emotional intimacies, classify it as a 'sub-genre,' of the literary archetype established by nineteenth century American writers such as Melville, Cooper and Twain and later explored and defined by Leslie Fiedler.<sup>157</sup> This is one of the most accurate classifications of K/S; indeed, as I will discuss in more detail in the conclusion, I believe this genre to be an antecedent of modern intimatopic fiction. Indeed, Lamb and Veith come closer to contextualising K/S appropriately than do the more recent theorists Sara Gwenllïan Jones and Salmon and Symons who insist that K/S is 'so similar to mainstream genre romances that it could reasonably be classified as a species of that genus'.<sup>158</sup> If this was the case then it would be difficult to account for the fact that K/S readers and writers generally detest

<sup>153</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* p.221

<sup>154</sup> Russ, *Magic Mommas*, p.95.

<sup>155</sup> Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins and Henry Jenkins, 'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking: Selections from *The Terra Nostra Underground* and *Strange Bedfellows*', in *Theorising Fandom: Fans Subculture and Identity*, ed. by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1998), pp.9-38 (p.11).

<sup>156</sup> Penley, 'Brownian Motion' p.137.

<sup>157</sup> Lamb and Veith, 'Romantic Myth' p.236.

<sup>158</sup> Gwenllïan Jones, 'Sex Lives'; Salmon and Symons, 'Slash Fiction', p.97.

genre romances; In Gilda's words: 'I've read, I think, two standard romance novels. I thought the women in both were idiots. In K/S though, you can have two strong characters instead of just one.' As Ivy puts it, 'The intimacy that most K/S writers attribute to Kirk and Spock is on a level that most romance novels and I daresay most romances never come close to,' Killa makes a similar distinction in her attempt to describe why K/S is not the same sex version of the Mills and Boon romance:

In K/S I love reading about Kirk and Spock working side by side, and sharing the same ideals. This was something I didn't get in romances. Also, it was the simple intimacy of Kirk and Spock's friendship that attracted me to K/S, there was no biology driving it, no "reason" that they had to be together, as there often was in romances, they just chose to share their lives and to care about each other.<sup>159</sup>

In the face of such evidence surely it is doubtful that, as Salmon and Symons claim, K/S and romance novels fulfil the same need in the reader? Although Salmon and Symons' reading of K/S fiction, which highlights the prevalence of images like 'soul mates',<sup>160</sup> is accurate, their reading of genre romances lets them down. They do not see how genre romances rely on misunderstandings which result from a lack of intimacy, work to situate physical attraction and sex as the central driving force of interpersonal relationships, and often end with the heroine marrying a man she hardly knows. The conclusions of romance novels rarely offer images of mental intimacy and indeed often offer the exact opposite. The following examples are taken from a random selection of romance novels and make an interesting contrast to the conclusions of K/S stories I reproduced earlier: 'what did she know about this man?'<sup>161</sup>, 'Trev clearly mistook the cause of her knitted brows',<sup>162</sup> 'After all this time, he still didn't know she was crazy in love with him,'<sup>163</sup> 'she had got it all wrong ... "how could you possibly think I didn't mean it?"',<sup>164</sup> and finally, 'You don't really understand how I feel about

<sup>159</sup> Gilda, Kirk Spock Heaven, 16 September 2004; Ivy, Kirk Spock Heaven, 19 September 2004; Killa, Kirk Spock Heaven, 17 September 2004.

<sup>160</sup> Salmon and Symons, 'Slash Fiction', p.99.

<sup>161</sup> Marie Ferrarella, *A Hero For All Seasons* (London: Silhouette, 2000), p.244.

<sup>162</sup> Donna Sterling, *Intimate Stranger* (Surrey: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001), p.210.

<sup>163</sup> Debbie Macomber, *Falling for Him* (Surrey: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 1996), p.182.

<sup>164</sup> Penny Jordan, *A Treacherous Seduction* (Surrey: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 1999), p.178-179.

you.’<sup>165</sup> It is apparent that K/S is neither unique, nor easily fitted into the genres of romance or pornography; the classification of intimatopia however accounts for the ideologies expressed by the community, as well as the literature it produces, and aligns K/S with professionally produced texts reflecting similar ideologies.

As this chapter has demonstrated these ideologies may be neither shared nor recognised by other, perhaps more culturally dominant, interpretive communities. K/S fans and other intimatopic readers and writers clearly offer alternatives to mainstream ideologies and may be seen as perpetuating and perhaps even promoting these alternatives. Although the influence of this is probably limited, in that intimatopic ideologies find the most resonance with those who already share them, there are some cases where intimatopic ideologies might be seen to have influenced mainstream culture. The community of K/S readers and writers, though marginalized, represents one of the largest groups of intimatopic interpreters and as such has perhaps had some influence on the *Star Trek* narratives. It is certain that there has been some genuine dialogue between the K/S community and the dominant community which produces *Star Trek*. Executive producer Havre Bennett contributed to early editions of *Interstat*, a fan run letter-zine in which the issue of K/S was hotly debated during the 1980s. In fact a letter from him appears in the same issue as a letter in which one fan writes, ‘I do not believe in the K/S premise [...]but I do agree that fans want to see Spock loving the captain.’<sup>166</sup> It does not seem impossible to me that several of the more ambiguous scenes in the later *Star Trek* films were incorporated with the idea of satisfying as many of the fannish interpretations of *Star Trek* as possible, including intimatopic ones.<sup>167</sup> These intimatopic ideologies may be detected in the source text in moments which appear to be referencing some unspecified intimacy between the heroes, such as Kirk’s claim in *Star Trek III* that, ‘if there is even a chance that Spock has an eternal soul then it’s my

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<sup>165</sup> Jill Shalvis, *Out of the Blue* (Surrey: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001), p.211.

<sup>166</sup> Verba, *Boldly Writing*, p.80.

<sup>167</sup> Echoing this idea one fan notes that *Star Trek III* has such an ‘open texture’ that it can be ‘incorporated into’ almost any fannish interpretation including the K/S one. Verba, *Boldly Writing* p.69.

responsibility [...].As surely as if it were my very own.'<sup>168</sup> In its Platonic reference to the joining of souls this image is thoroughly intimatopic and, whilst it is unclear whether these specific ideologies have influenced the dominant culture, I do not need to restate here how deeply *Star Trek* continues to pervade our culture at various levels.<sup>169</sup> Intimatopic authors have certainly been a small but significant part of western culture for at least 60 years. In order to understand their contribution to the history, of women's writing, interpersonal interaction and same sex representation it has been necessary to define and isolate the genre and to name it - intimatopia.

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<sup>168</sup> *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, Written and produced by Harve Bennett, directed by Leonard Nimoy, 1984.

<sup>169</sup> I do not however wish to go as far as Jacqueline Lichtenberg does when she claims that without *Star Trek* her genre of intimate adventure could not have existed. Her insistence that 'the genre did not exist when [she] started writing'(personal communication, 5 March 2004) would exclude texts by Renault and Hill, deny antecedents such as Plato and nineteenth century American literature, and somewhat overstates the cultural influence of *Star Trek*.

**Chapter Six**  
**Conclusions**  
**Outline of a Genre**

This thesis set out to elucidate the existence of a previously unexplored genre of women's literature by focusing on the ideologically informed construction of appropriative texts. It is now clear that, in their representation of male intimacy, these appropriative texts, be they professional, amateur, sexual or ambiguous show a remarkable degree of coherence. This coherence has suggested the existence of an interpretive community made up of dispersed and often unconnected individuals for whom intimacy is central to reading and writing practice. Because of the centrality of intimacy I have termed these texts, and the community that produces them, intimatopic. The ideologies fostered within this interpretive community are embodied in the textual and theoretical practices of its, mostly female, constituent members. Intimatopic texts and the ideologies they reflect are part of our cultural history, they comment upon the place of intimacy in society, offering alternatives to both hegemonic ideologies and those common within other interpretive communities. Although intimatopic ideologies are distinct from queer ideologies they also form a part of the history of the representation of same sex interactions from intimate friendships to sexual encounters. Intimatopic texts are also part of the history of women's writing, highlighting the often marginalized issue of women writing about men and helping to illuminate the ideologies common within women's interpretive communities. In all three of these roles intimatopic texts present the reader with a distinctive ideological framework facilitated by a number of common textual features. These ideological and textual features are shared by texts from a variety of westernised cultures and clearly suggest that the interpretive strategies used by women within these cultures are similar. Throughout this thesis my approach has been driven by the literature I have examined and I have been at pains to avoid Iser's criticism that 'all too often literary critics [...] reduce texts to the proportions of their theories, instead of adapting their theories to fit in with the



texts'.<sup>1</sup> My theory of intimatopia began in the textual analysis of appropriation and throughout this thesis has been adapted to the features shown by the texts themselves. Using appropriative fiction as a starting point I have extracted the literary features and ideological underpinnings of intimatopia, these can now be used to discover and categorise a great many more intimatopic texts which, like Mel Keegan's, may not be overtly appropriative in nature. I shall mention just some of these other texts in the forthcoming discussion of intimatopic ideologies and textual features and a longer, though still far from exhaustive, list of intimatopic texts can be found in appendix two.

### The Intimatopic Genre

I initially described this genre of literature in Dollimore's terms, as a group of texts 'loosely connected through shared representations'.<sup>2</sup> Although this is actually a definition he offers in opposition to the tighter idea of a 'genre', I feel that it accurately describes the nature of many texts which, like intimatopic ones, though sharing generic features could be simultaneously classified within several genres. For instance K/S is part of the genre of slash fiction just as much as it is part of the intimatopic genre, *Regeneration* is a historical novel as much as it is an intimatopic one and Mel Keegan's novels simultaneously belong to the somewhat conflicting genres of gay romance and intimatopia. Whether these texts are considered primarily as intimatopic or as part of their other genres should depend upon the context in which they are to be discussed; this should not present a problem for, as Cranny-Francis points out, 'no text is the univocal construct of a single genre'.<sup>3</sup> Insisting that intimatopia can be considered a generic classification provides the modern reader with a way of accurately classifying texts from disparate backgrounds, indeed Ann Harvey claims that a generic term 'provides clues to the reader as to the unspoken assumptions that he

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.xi-xii.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.45

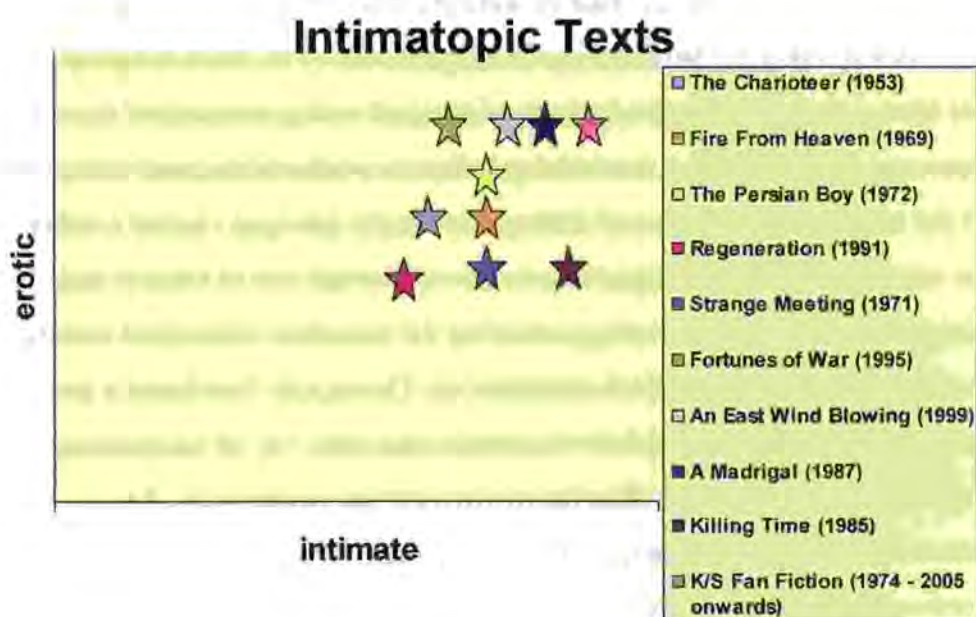
<sup>3</sup> Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990), p.20 and p.34.

or she will need to make in order to understand the story'.<sup>4</sup> Recent research in cognition has highlighted this by providing evidence that 'once the genre schema has been activated during an instance of text processing and a set of expectations generated this will have a determining influence on the subsequent interpretation of the text'.<sup>5</sup> The discussion of *Killing Time* in the previous chapter touched upon the repercussions of reading ambiguous texts through sexual schema and also highlighted the importance of appreciating the unspoken ideological assumptions made by intimatopic texts and communities. This is why the idea of a genre is useful, because it offers a relatively simple schematic way of categorising and contextualising texts, providing the modern critical reader with a base upon which to build understanding. Although intimatopic texts span sexual and nonsexual, professional and amateur, fictional and theoretical texts from a variety of westernised cultures, they display a remarkable similarity in ideological perspective and textual practice. Regarding intimatopia as a genre provides a way to discuss these apparently divergent types of text whilst taking account of their similarities. Whilst intimatopic texts are far from identical, they all show a distinctive combination of eroticism and intimacy. Throughout this thesis I have developed and used a chart to represent the textual encodings common to intimatopic texts and I can now use the same chart to compare the texts which have been central to my discussion so far.

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<sup>4</sup> Ann F. Harvey, *Rewriting the Women of Camelot: Arthurian Popular Fiction and Feminism* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Tahir Wood, 'Cognitive Processes in Text Interpretation: Re-reading Bakhtin', *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 33 (2004), 25-40 (p.37).



Though spanning more than fifty years, from 1953 to 2005, these texts all cluster at the top right hand corner of the chart, offering the reader a large number of both erotic and intimate cues. Though *Regeneration* is significantly less erotic and less intimate than K/S fan fiction, these two texts, one a successful novel, the other amateur fiction share an ideological interest in combining intimate and erotic cues in the depiction of intimacy between men. Elisabeth Wesseling claims that texts within a particular genre must share ‘a repertoire of thematic elements and formal features’<sup>6</sup> and it is clear that intimatopic texts demonstrate considerable consistency on both these counts. I would suggest that to be considered as part of the intimatopic genre a text should demonstrate an overriding concern for interpersonal intimacy which is expressed through a significant number of the intimatopic ideologies and textual features discussed below.

### Intimatopic Ideologies...

As I have already mentioned at several points throughout this thesis intimatopic ideologies often run counter to hegemonic ideologies about love, friendship and male intimacy. I claimed in the introduction that appropriative

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History As a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 1991), p.96.

novels, whilst able to evade modern historical issues inevitably re-encode modern ideologies. This is certainly the case, and yet the ideologies they re-encode need not reflect the hegemony accepted by the majority, but instead may reflect distinctive ideologies accepted within smaller interpretive communities that cannot but inflect the texts they produce. The ideologically informed act of intimatopic encoding (or re-encoding if the text is appropriative in nature) situates social and erotic cues within a distinctive ideological framework though which their intimacy is enhanced. This framework constitutes a number of distinctive ideological perspectives; although I shall discuss them separately here, intimatopic ideologies are deeply interwoven in individual texts, supporting and informing each other in a way far more fluid than that suggested by the following discussion.

The most central ideological concern of intimatopic texts is the weaving together of erotic, social and intimate cues into holistic relationships which, whether sexual or ambiguous, combine love, friendship and intimacy. Intimatopic ideologies insist on the coexistence of intimate and erotic elements, connecting them across the cultural faultline that frequently works to separate them. For writers wishing to explore a range of possible intimacies the ambiguous text is ideal with its naturally open structure allowing for any relationship to be encoded through a variety of intimate and often erotic cues. Within the ambiguous context these erotic cues enhance the apparent intimacy but do not denote sexual attraction. For writers wishing to explore how this kind of holistic intimacy might be incorporated into a sexual relationship the sexual text is carefully negotiated so that eroticism becomes the logical extension of other, often pre-existing, intimacies. In an early historical intimatopia published in 1951 by the French writer Marguerite Yourcenar, her male protagonist, the emperor Hadrian, 'thought of inventing a new kind of intimacy in which the companion in pleasure would not cease to be the beloved and the friend'.<sup>7</sup> This is just the kind of connection envisaged by later sexual intimatopias where the image of friendship underpins and parallels that of sexual attraction. Patricia Nell Warren's *The Front Runner* (1974), a non-appropriative sexual intimatopia with

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<sup>7</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian, and Reflections on the Composition of Memoirs of Hadrian*, trans. by Grace Frick (London: Penguin, 1986) p.154.



a tragic ending, reflects Hadrian's ideal that lovers should also be friends. In the words of the marriage pledge exchanged between her two male protagonists, friendship, physical love and intimacy combine: 'I William Sive, take you, Harlan Brown, as my man and my friend in body and soul.'<sup>8</sup> Even in ambiguous intimatopias, where the eroticism is not made manifest through a sexual relationship, friends are depicted as being in 'love', a combination which is far from contradictory in the intimatopic world. Indeed, Harvey, the male protagonist of Susan Hill's ambiguous intimatopia *The Bird of Night*, claims that his friendship with the insane poet Francis grew 'because I love him.'<sup>9</sup> This fluid connection between love, friendship and intimacy could be explained, as Camille Bacon Smith attempts to, by insisting that all intimatopic writers, like the fan writers she discusses, 'tap intuitively [...] into knowledge expressed theoretically by Eva [*sic*] Kosofsky Sedgwick'.<sup>10</sup> On some level this is certainly true and I have already mentioned how Sedgwick's imaginative investments as expressed in her confessional essay 'White Glasses' parallel those of many intimatopic writers. However from a similar beginning Sedgwick's critical practice diverges from that of intimatopic writers for, although both propose a continuum between social and erotic behaviours, Sedgwick's critical interventions work to centralise sex, whilst intimatopic ideologies work to centralise intimacy.

This brings me to the second ideological feature of intimatopia, its moderated eroticism. Since love, friendship and intimacy are so deeply connected, intimatopic ideologies insist that erotic love is only of value when it retains its intimacy. In the sexual text erotic moderation, showcased when the heroes are too tired or too injured to have sex, may be used to highlight how the intimacy they share transcends the sexual element of their relationship. In line with this, intimate sexual interaction, when it is foregrounded, is envisaged as a deeper level of the intimacy already expressed. In many texts sex becomes a tool for intimacy; as Yorcenar's Hadrian describes it, sex is 'one more technique for getting to know what is not ourselves'.<sup>11</sup> The two sexual intimatopias written by

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Nell Warren, *The Front Runner* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p.199.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Hill, *The Bird of Night* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973) p.177.

<sup>10</sup> Camille Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1991), p.248.

<sup>11</sup> Yorcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, p.24.



Patricia Nell Warren, *The Front Runner* (1974) and *The Wild Man* (2001), both describe sex as 'intimacy'<sup>12</sup> and her sexual descriptions are saturated with intimate images which characterise the sexual experience: 'we were almost one body',<sup>13</sup> 'our flesh, our minds, our emotions, our spirits, trying to grow together'.<sup>14</sup> Ambiguous and sexual texts may express moderated eroticism quite differently. In the ambiguous text where the sexual is never directly invoked, moderation is a result of the ambiguous structure where a limited number of erotic cues create and maintain ambiguity. Whilst the sexual text has to work hard to foreground the intimacy it encodes, ambiguous intimatopias are an ideal medium for centralizing the drama of intimate union. This is powerfully explored by Poppy Z. Brite's *Lost Souls* (1992), a vampire novel which juxtaposes an ambiguous intimatopic relationship against an explicit and violent background. There is a lot of sex in this novel; it is often extremely violent, necrophilic and anything but intimate, however Brite's two male heroes, Ghost and Steve, share an ambiguous, and contrastingly intimate, relationship. The intimacy of their interaction is highlighted by its striking ambiguity although, as is typical of intimatopic texts, it is encoded through numerous erotic cues, it is one of the few relationships which is not made sexual. Brite's Steve and Ghost think that 'just to hold each other' is 'not enough' and wish that 'their hearts could be joined',<sup>15</sup> they embrace, they hold hands, kiss, claim they 'love' each other and even share a bed, but they do not have sex. Erotic cues abound but the context demands that they are connected to intimacy rather than sexual desire. In its extreme depictions of sexual violence Brite's text virtually demonises sexual interaction which is not intimate, even whilst eroticism is fundamental to its idealism of intimate relationships. Across the many ways in which eroticism is negotiated by the intimatopic text there is an underlying ideological assumption that intimacy, rather than sex, is the central defining principle of human interaction.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Nell Warren, *The Wild Man* (Beverly Hills: Wildcat Press, 2001), p.198; Nell Warren, *The Front Runner*, p.110.

<sup>13</sup> Nell Warren, *The Front Runner*, p.100.

<sup>14</sup> Nell Warren, *The Wild Man*, p.198.

<sup>15</sup> Poppy Z. Brite, *Lost Souls* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p.351.

The moderated eroticism of the intimatopic text is clearly connected to its ideological investments in mental unity, the shared souls paradigm which found expression in the Platonic ideal of 'making one of two'.<sup>16</sup> Whilst modern hegemonic ideologies tend to connect such images to physical interaction and sex, the intimatopic text privileges images of mental and even spiritual connection in both sexual and ambiguous relationships. Renault's Bagoas dreams of 'the happy harmony' of his and Alexander's 'souls,'<sup>17</sup> her Hephaestion is so close to Alexander that he 'is Alexander too,'<sup>18</sup> and her heroes of the second world war, Ralph and Laurie know things about one another 'without being told'.<sup>19</sup> Marion Zimmer Bradley's sexual intimatopia, *The Catch Trap*, about the trapeze artists Tommy and Mario describes the relationship the two men share as 'more than love, more than sexuality,' a union in which they had 'only one heartbeat'.<sup>20</sup> Patricia Nell Warren's *The Wild Man* similarly envisages its heroes as having 'been joined in spirit since birth'.<sup>21</sup> This idealisation of spiritual unity often manifests itself in face-to-face communication and images of unspoken understanding which suggest a kind of bonding at various levels of literalness. Many intimatopic texts give their heroes what Bacon Smith calls 'the mind meld treatment',<sup>22</sup> either suggesting or denoting telepathic elements to communication. Diane Duane's heroes in *The Door into Fire* 'began to see through each other',<sup>23</sup> the night they first had sex and are ultimately rewarded with the gift of telepathy, and, despite not actually being telepathic, Mercedes Lackey's heroes in *Magic's Pawn* 'didn't need words'<sup>24</sup> to communicate their feelings. The 'unspoken communication' shared by Brite's heroes, Steve and Ghost, is manifestly telepathic and the two exchange silent messages shown in the text in italics. Whether actual or metaphorical the mental unity which underpins the intimatopic relationship betrays the community's ideological interest in connections through

<sup>16</sup> Plato, 'The Symposium', in *Symposium and Phaedrus: Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, ed. by Candace Ward (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), pp.1- 43 (p.17).

<sup>17</sup> Mary Renault, *The Persian Boy* (London: Penguin, 1984), p.140.

<sup>18</sup> Renault, *The Persian Boy*, p.40.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Renault, *The Charioteer* (London: Longman's Green, 1953), p.344.

<sup>20</sup> Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap* (New York: Ballantine, 1979), p.469.

<sup>21</sup> Nell Warren, *The Wild Man*, p.199.

<sup>22</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.231.

<sup>23</sup> Diane Duane, *The Door Into Fire* (London: Magnum, 1981), p.99.

<sup>24</sup> Mercedes Lackey, *Magic's Pawn* (New York: Daw Books, 1989), p.120.

which two individuals can become, as Plato puts it, 'wholly one'.<sup>25</sup> Within the intimatopic community the Platonic image of two individuals sharing the same soul characterises the intimacy which develops between men and here again there is a striking contrast between the way intimatopia envisages such intimacy and hegemonic ideologies which suggest that 'a real man wants and needs nobody'.<sup>26</sup>

Intimatopia's interest in mental unity is often responsible for creating a textual climate in which reciprocity characterises all levels of intimacy and indeed an ideological commitment to reciprocity characterises texts within this genre. I have already discussed several examples of mental reciprocity but in the intimatopic text this reciprocity extends back into the physical realm as well. Just as mental reciprocity is an uncontested ideal within intimatopic communities so physical reciprocity usually comes easily to intimatopic heroes whose ideologies neither question nor preclude such expressions of intimacy. This is made very clear in sexual texts in which both the male protagonists, like the heroes of *The Front Runner*, 'surrender' to penetration and develop a relationship in which sexual interaction is characterised by the desire to both 'give and receive'.<sup>27</sup> Often however the sexual text does not specify exactly who does what to whom but, like Duane's *The Door into Fire*, simply describes the physical reciprocity of sex as sharing.<sup>28</sup> The lack of concern which both these approaches show over who's 'on top' is a contrast to hegemonic heterosexual ideologies which position the man as the penetrating and hence sexually dominating partner. Interestingly it is also a contrast to the dominant ideologies of male homosexual communities in which the 'power dynamic' remains an 'integral part' of sexual interaction.<sup>29</sup> Even intimatopic texts which like *The Wild Man* and *Fortunes of War* explore the negotiation that men make with their masculinity to accept penetration always work towards an end point where all sex acts are willingly reciprocated with no subjugation of either partner's desires. Indeed whatever takes place in bed, when it is shared by intimate heroes, the intimatopic text always encodes it

<sup>25</sup> Plato, 'The Symposium', p.18.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Miller, *Men and Friendship* (London: Gateway Books, 1983), p.17.

<sup>27</sup> Nell Warren, *The Front Runner*, p.110.

<sup>28</sup> Duane, *The Door Into Fire*, p.104 and p.107.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Jensen, 'Homecoming: The Relevance of Radical Feminism for Gay Men', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47 (2004), 75-81 (p.77).

as reciprocal and as I have shown, even depictions of violent sex can be turned to the ideological exploration of reciprocity. This is the case with the occasionally violent interactions which take place in K/S fiction, such as that in Della Van Hise's K/S novel *A Question of Balance*, in which, with an unusual take on reciprocity, Kirk and Spock each penetrate the other in a violent manner. The characters' motivations however derive from their desire for reciprocal experiences, Spock, for instance 'wanted to be hurt[...] to feel the agony he knew Kirk had felt'.<sup>30</sup> Thus even in violence the intimatopic text betrays its ideological interest in reciprocity. The ambiguous intimatopia too is inflected with physical reciprocity, which it is remarkably adept at finding ways to encode into its ambiguous structure. Scenes of hurt/comfort are often used in this regard for they provide a situation in which two men may be imagined as holding one another, 'coaxing, rocking'<sup>31</sup> without the physical interaction being understood in sexual terms. However, ambiguous texts do not always provide an alibi for the physical exchanges they imagine, indeed such unexplained scenes of physical intimacy are particularly common in K/S fan fiction in which, although they are not lovers Kirk and Spock may be depicted as 'holding, [...] each other tight, their breath pounding in each others ears'.<sup>32</sup> These depictions of physical but non-sexual reciprocity between men are strikingly at odds with hegemonic ideologies about male interaction which, Don Clark feels, suggest that, 'expression of affection between men is seriously inhibited [...], men can argue, fight and injure one another in public view but they cannot as easily hold hands, embrace or kiss.'<sup>33</sup> In the intimatopic text however, governed as it is by intimatopic ideologies, men can and do offer reciprocal expressions of affection, both mental and physical, without inhibition. It is perhaps because of the particularly striking contrast here between hegemonic and intimatopic ideologies that it is in these non-sexual scenes of affection that intimatopia's investments in physical reciprocity become most obvious.

<sup>30</sup> Della Van Hise, *A Question of Balance* (California: Pon Farr Press, 1980), p.56 [fanzine].

<sup>31</sup> Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin, 1992), p.180 for a more detailed discussion of this passage see p.96.

<sup>32</sup> Martha J. Bonds, "The Miracle of Christmas Past", *A Contact Christmas*, (1979) 18-27 (p.25) [fanzine].

<sup>33</sup> Don Clark, 'Homosexual Encounter in all Male Groups', in *Men and Masculinity*, ed. by Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974). pp88-93 (p88).



Finally, intimatopic texts display an ideological interest in exclusivity through which the intimacy depicted is exclusive to the individuals who share it. If, as is occasionally the case, there is not a single exclusive relationship between two individuals, the longing for such exclusivity is central to the text. This is the case in Anne Rice's vampire novels, which are only marginally intimatopic, in which although vampires are solitary predators they none the less long for an intimacy they never quite achieve. As Armand says to his vampire companion Louis: 'I loved you,[...] I believed I would gather you too me and hold you. And time would open up to us.'<sup>34</sup> More commonly, however, the intimatopic text encodes the bond between its heroes as exclusive. It may be that this is the first and only time the heroes fall 'deeply in love', or it may be that the depth of intimacy they share cannot be 'touched' by any other relationship.<sup>35</sup> In either case the relationship is always 'another matter altogether'.<sup>36</sup> The intimatopic text may make this ideal so manifest that its heroes exchange pledges in some kind of parallel to the heterosexual marriage; indeed heroes in *The Front Runner*, *An East Wind Blowing* and *The Charioteer* all exchange some kind of promise and K/S stories frequently envisage Kirk and Spock becoming 'bonded' through various levels of formality and ritual. The exclusivity of the heroes' relationship is often highlighted by their contrasting isolation or outcast status. The stereotypical K/S story, so common in the early years of fandom that it has become a cliché, involves Kirk and Spock being stranded together on an uninhabited planet. Although taken to extremes in this cliché, something like this is a particularly common feature of intimatopic texts; Mel Keegan isolates her heroes on an island, Patricia Nell Warren creates a wildlife preserve where her heroes retreat to almost total isolation, and Mary Renault provides Alexander and Hephaestion with a secret retreat in the woods. Novels which do not go to such extremes juxtapose the exclusivity of the heroes relationship with the social isolation they otherwise experience (see p.111). Images such as that offered by Pat Barker as she describes Rivers 'at Craiglockhart, on the black and white tiled floor, alone',<sup>37</sup> where one of the heroes is seen in isolation, form a contrast to

<sup>34</sup> Anne Rice, *Interview with a Vampire* (1976 repr. London: Warner, 2000), p.361.

<sup>35</sup> Nell Warren, *The Front Runner* p.40; Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap*, p.483.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Hill, *Strange Meeting* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.159.

<sup>37</sup> Barker, *Regeneration*, p.248.



scenes of intimacy when the heroes are seen together and highlight the ideological value placed on the exclusivity of interpersonal intimacy.

### **...And the Textual Features Which Serve Them**

The ideological landscape of intimatopia, outlined above, is characterised by a number of particularly common textual features. Just as ideologies of exclusivity appear to give rise to texts which encode the individual heroes, either literally or figuratively, as outcasts, other ideological issues are served by recurring textual features. Many of these features are popular because they can be made to serve a number of intimatopic ideologies and probably the most pervasive of these is the use of ambiguous homosocial spaces. An interest in sexual ambiguity is something which runs throughout modern literature and culture and yet the boundary between the sexual and the non sexual has often been narrowed or even erased by literary interpreters; indeed in order to discuss the breadth of possibilities ambiguous texts offer for re-encoding, I had to theorise ambiguity myself. All the appropriative novels I have discussed in detail are based upon ambiguous homosocial sources and those intimatopic texts which are not appropriative create similar backdrops: Anne Rice's vampires and their human friends form a male bonded society, Mercedes' Lackey imagines a training camp for her Herald-Mages which is not unlike a boarding school in its intimate intensity, Diane Duane's male characters form a band of warriors, similar to that imagined by Mel Keegan's *An East Wind Blowing* and Marion Zimmer Bradley's heroes work in the homosocial word of the circus, within which men and women are segregated. This recurring textual feature is in striking contrast to Jane Miller's assumption that female writers don't like to write about the homosocial activities of 'learning and fighting and hunting and judging and governing' because they fear 'they could get it wrong'.<sup>38</sup> Far from fearing misrepresentation, intimatopic writers appropriate and create these images adapting them to suit their own ideological perspectives. Intimatopic writers are keen to exploit the intimate potential of homosociality and, as Penley points out, 'the navy ship[...]the prison, the gym, the police precinct and the

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<sup>38</sup> Jane Miller, *Women Writing About Men* (London: Virago Press, 1986), p.13.

wide open range' all provide an 'alibi' for such intimacy.<sup>39</sup> The social and erotic cues suggested by these contexts are exploited by intimatopic writers and encoded in ways that resonate within the intimatopic interpretive community. Social cues are encoded so that the interpersonal facets of homosocial interaction become indicative of intimacy and the texts enact a privatisation of the homosocial experience. Cicioni is quite correct in claiming that slash fiction often dramatizes 'a same sex working partnership being extended to the emotional/sexual sphere'<sup>40</sup> but it is not just any working partnership that intimatopic slash fans are attracted to, but specifically an ambiguous one already suggesting the erotic cues which the fans then highlight through re-encoding.

The use that intimatopic interpretive communities make of ambiguous homosocial elements can be contrasted to that which is made by queer communities who seem far less interested in their potential for intimacy. The gay novel *Tim and Pete* by James Robert Baker (1996) describes a cultural appropriation made by Randy, a minor character within the homosexual subcultures it depicts. Randy has re-dubbed VCR footage of films and television shows to give them a homoerotic narrative, for instance in the Last Supper sequence from Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings* things become very sexual: "'why don't we pull our cocks out under the table?'" Christ suggests, lowering his eyes. "Wow, mine's so hard it hurts!"<sup>41</sup> Whilst this re-encoding also draws on 'ambiguous looks'<sup>42</sup> it makes very little use of intimacy and does not privatise the homosocial experience, preferring a group fantasy which replaces the intimate with the sexual. Whereas intimatopic encodings attempt to weave imported social and erotic cues together, Randy's re-encoding overwrites social cues with sexual ones. Intimatopic interpreters do not enhance eroticism, as Randy does, by divorcing it from the intimate social context that suggests it, but instead, use social interactions as the building blocks of erotically inflected

<sup>39</sup> Constance Penley, 'Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics and Technology', in *Cultural Politics Volume 3: Technoculture*, ed. by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp135-161 (p153).

<sup>40</sup> Mirna Cicioni, 'Male Pair-Bonds and Female desire in Fan Slash Writing', in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans Subculture and Identity*, ed by Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1998), p.172.

<sup>41</sup> James Robert Baker, *Tim and Pete* (London: Forth Estate, 1996), p.247

<sup>42</sup> Baker, *Tim and Pete*, p.247.

interpersonal relationships. Randy's re-encoding is closer to the textual aesthetics of 'queering' than to those of intimatopia, because it uses its creative intervention to situate the sexual as the central driving force of interpersonal interaction.

I have just discussed how the intimatopic text often uses homosocial sources to represent the privatisation of homosocial bonds, however this textual strategy finds a reflection in any manoeuvre which works towards depicting a privatised unity of two. Characterized by images which isolate the shared experience of the intimate individuals, the privatisation of homosocial bonds supports ideologies of exclusivity and may also help to dramatize the progression of friendship towards love. Although telepathy probably represents the highest form of this privatisation, images of kinship and bonding also serve to represent the homosocial experience as private and personal. This is particularly clear in appropriative texts through which professional homosocial bonds become personal ones as social cues are resituated as signs of intimacy. For instance, the textual manoeuvre made by K/S fiction as it remakes Kirk and Spock into lovers as well as friends and colleagues, re-encodes their professional closeness as indicative of personal interest. As interpersonal bonds grow, the wider social context tends to become narrowed. This is rather extremely demonstrated by the professionally published *Star Trek* story by Jennifer Guttridge, an ambiguous intimatopia entitled "The Winged Dreamers" in which Spock says to Kirk: 'Why do we have to leave here? We can stay. Just you and I. We don't need those others.'<sup>43</sup> 'Those others', the crew of the Enterprise, crucial within the original source, become less important in the increasingly private world of Kirk and Spock's shared intimacy. Whether the text uses the physical isolation suggested by uninhabited islands or the mental unity suggested by telepathy or some combination of these metaphors the textual function is the same, to highlight intimacy. As Marion Zimmer Bradley pointed out in *The Catch Trap*, in 1950s America, 'two men content with one another's company were conspicuous'; the various textual manoeuvres which intimatopic texts make to depict the privatised relationship between two individuals content with each other's

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<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Guttridge, 'The Winged Dreamers', in *The New Voyages: Star Trek*, ed. by Sondra Marshak and Myrna Culbreath (London: Titan, 1992), pp.141-175 (p.172).

company still sets the genre apart from male texts which tend to suggest that the ideal hero should be 'self-sufficient'.<sup>44</sup>

Legitimated and justified within this increasingly narrowed homosocial environment is the image of hurt/comfort. This textual feature is a particularly common one, which is found to some degree in all the intimatopic texts I have mentioned in this thesis. In these texts, hurt/comfort functions rather like the sex does to engender intimacy, but hurt/comfort has the advantage that it can be used by the sexual and ambiguous text alike. Hurt/comfort can be made to serve many of the ideologies of intimatopia and it is perhaps because of its sheer adaptability that it is so common. The confessions it engenders through the vulnerability it encodes serve ideologies of mental unity and the touching it legitimates allows this reciprocity to be extended towards the physical. The way in which hurt/comfort offers erotic cues which are not tied to a sexual context also serves the genre's ideological interests in moderated eroticism. Although Camille Bacon Smith seems to think that hurt/comfort is used by women who want to write about intimacy but for whom 'sex is prohibited'<sup>45</sup> between men, in fact hurt/comfort is used as much by the sexual text as by the ambiguous one. Cicioni argues that the hurt/comfort so often found in women's literature is an 'eroticization of nurturance'<sup>46</sup> but I believe that the image of nurturing is really too specific to account for all cases of hurt/comfort and I prefer to understand it as one more textual strategy for encoding intimacy. Indeed part of its attraction is probably its ability to highlight a whole range of intimacies, which may be nurturant, maternal, paternal, filial, confessional or erotic. Hurt/comfort is also a textual feature which allows men to show their more feminine sides, either through vulnerability or caring, for, as Barker's Rivers remarks, the violence of war not only made men vulnerable and hence 'feminine', but also 'set up a relationship between officers and men that was ... domestic. Caring. [...] maternal'.<sup>47</sup> In Barker's intimatopic re-encoding of the war years the war allows

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<sup>44</sup> Derek Longhurst, 'Science Fiction: Dreams of Men', in *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*, ed. by Derek Longhurst, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.192-211(p.195).

<sup>45</sup> Bacon Smith, *Enterprising Women*, p.256.

<sup>46</sup> Cicioni, 'Male Pair-Bonds', p.163.

<sup>47</sup> Barker, *Regeneration* p.108, p.107.



men to behave in intimate ways otherwise thought feminine and hence uncharacteristic of male interaction.

Frequently engendered by hurt/comfort, face-to-face communication is another of the most common features of the intimatopic text where men are depicted as communicating in this supposedly feminine way. Whilst hurt/comfort provides the ideal way to induce such communication, because fever and delirium, or simply pain and weakness is depicted as facilitating emotional confession, face-to-face communication is also part of the privatised homosocial environment and is often highlighted by ideologies of exclusivity. Here again there is a direct contrast to hegemonic assumptions about masculinity: discussing the parameters of male friendship, Marc Fasteau writes in *Men and Masculinity*, 'Can you imagine men talking to each other saying: 'Are you sure you're not angry with me?', 'I just learned something important about myself and I've got to tell you' or 'I feel nervous talking to you like this'? He concludes that, within male friendship, 'It just doesn't happen'.<sup>48</sup> However in intimatopia it frequently does: 'I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, Don't hate me' says Steve to Ghost<sup>49</sup>, 'There is something I have to tell you' insists Francis to Harvey,<sup>50</sup> 'you know I think I love you' says Herewiss to Freelorn,<sup>51</sup> 'I can't just yet[...]give me a little time' admits Juan to Antonio.<sup>52</sup> In each of these moments the relationships depicted in intimatopic texts, transgress cultural assumptions about male interaction. The face-to-face communication characteristic of intimatopic texts is often considered one of its most feminine features: Camille Bacon Smith, for instance, criticizes Mercedes Lackey's openly emoting heroes for being 'more attuned to the fantasies of adolescent girls than those of the gay male'.<sup>53</sup> Although Lackey's text *Magic's Pawn* in which Vanyel tearfully tells Tylendel, 'I'd do anything for you, so long as they didn't take me away from you',<sup>54</sup> is one of the more extreme in

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<sup>48</sup> Marc Fasteau, 'Why Aren't We Talking?', in *Men and Masculinity*, pp.19-21(p19).

<sup>49</sup> Z. Brite, *Lost Souls*, p.168.

<sup>50</sup> Hill, *The Bird of Night*, p.47

<sup>51</sup> Duane, *The Door Into Fire*, p.298.

<sup>52</sup> Nell Warren, *The Wild Man*, p.292.

<sup>53</sup> Camille Bacon Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p.144.

<sup>54</sup> Lackey, *Magic's Pawn* p.143



this regard, the femininity implied by the open expression of intimacy is part of the wider gender blending aspects of the intimatopic text.

All intimatopic texts contain heroes who show at least some level of gender blending. In the appropriative text this is often a thread linking source and appropriation as if intimatopic writers are drawn to sources in which men have a number of 'feminine' characteristics. From Rivers, the good listener, to Bagoas, the eunuch, and Kirk, the compassionate commander, a large number of borrowed characters integrate masculine and feminine elements. When these elements have not been imported from the source they are constructed during encoding and gender blending men are as much a feature of original intimatopias as appropriative ones. Camille Bacon Smith is quite wrong in her insistence that one of the major literary 'transgressions' of media fan fiction is its 'feminised' male heroes,<sup>55</sup> for this is a common feature of many types of women's literature, not just intimatopia. Indeed, the integrative construction of masculinity appears to map directly onto what many theorists consider to be a female ideal, that of the tender warrior.<sup>56</sup> The gender blending qualities of the heroes of romantopia have been discussed by Radway and Krentz, who claim that these men are, 'constructed androgynously',<sup>57</sup> as 'strong but gentle', 'masculine but caring', 'protective[...] and tender'.<sup>58</sup> Supporting the theory that such constructions are a feminine ideal, one female media fan describes her ideal hero in terms which almost alternate masculine and feminine elements, as 'strong, sensitive, caring, stoic, driven and conflicted'.<sup>59</sup> The representation of gender integrative men might suggest the desire for a 'new masculinity'<sup>60</sup> which mixes feminine and masculine elements but, as I suggested on p.182 it does not transcend gender boundaries. Doan and Waters claim that good writers of lesbian historical novels, 'problematize the very categories with which sex and gender are

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<sup>55</sup> Bacon Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, p.113.

<sup>56</sup> Catherine Salmon and Donald Symons, *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London: Verso, 1987), p.15.

<sup>58</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.130.

<sup>59</sup> MacGeorge 'The Nature of Slash', (1999) on line <<http://www.wordsmiths.net/essays.htm>>.

<sup>60</sup> Anne Cranny-Francis, 'Different Identities, Different Voices: possibilities and Pleasures in Some of Jean Lorrah's *Star Trek* Novels', *Science Fiction Studies*, 24 (1997), 245-255 (p.249).

constructed'<sup>61</sup> but this is exactly what my intimatopic writers fail to do despite their same sex focus, for their integration of gendered characteristics leaves unquestioned the masculinity or femininity associated with individual traits. Even Joanna Russ' appreciative essay about K/S fiction maintains binary thinking even as it praises the genre for being 'entirely free of the culture's whole discourse of gender' for this 'freedom' is one which is achieved by a constant shifting of 'responsibility, initiative, activity, passivity, strength and weakness [...] from one to the other'.<sup>62</sup> If this is freedom from gendered discourse, it is nonetheless predicated upon binaries which fail to destabilise the assumption that certain characteristics are masculine and feminine. Perhaps, despite an ideal of integration, there is really very little desire to eradicate gendered markers altogether, for, as Pat Barker has Rivers suggest: 'nobody wants to be *neuter*'.<sup>63</sup> If Rivers speaks from Barkers' intimatopic perspective, this implies that within the intimatopic community, though stereotypically masculine and feminine traits might combine in the ideal androgynous hero, the fact that these traits remain recognisable as masculine and feminine prevents the hero from being 'neutered'.

Although Salmon and Symons have suggested that gender blending enables the 'fantasy of being a co-warrior',<sup>64</sup> and despite the intimatopic text's reciprocal ideologies, the intimatopic genre rarely shows real egalitarianism and indeed I have refrained from using that term until now. Instead the final shared textual feature of intimatopic texts that I shall discuss is their ambivalent relationship to egalitarianism and hierarchy which I describe as 'quasi-egalitarianism'. Most appropriative intimatopias import an essentially hierarchical relationship through which they develop images of reciprocity. Bagoas is Alexander's slave, Alexander is Hephaestion's commander, Rivers is Sassoon's doctor and Kirk is Spock's captain. Although Hoberman correctly claims that sexually speaking Renault's characters 'do not fit into any stable

<sup>61</sup> Laura Doan and Sarah Waters, 'Making up Lost Time: Contemporary Lesbian Writing and the Invention of History', in *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*, ed. by David Alderson and Linda Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.12-28 (p.25).

<sup>62</sup> Joanna Russ, *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts: Feminist Essays* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1985), p.89, p.83.

<sup>63</sup> Barker, *Regeneration*, p.54.

<sup>64</sup> Salmon and Symons, *Warrior Lovers*, p.89.

hierarchy,<sup>65</sup> they are certainly separated by hierarchical patterns. What could be more hierarchical than the images of master and slave or king and subject? Pat Barker does not use re-encoding to remove the hierarchies she imports any more than Mary Renault does, and even emphasises how Rivers had 'enormous power over [...] men'.<sup>66</sup> This quasi-egalitarian pattern was extremely common in the nineteenth century American novel and finds expression in today's culture in so called buddy movies. Fredrick Zackel explores the long history of this common literary paradigm, which he believes originated in with Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. As he points out, 'Friday was Crusoe's slave. That he was a benevolent master does not change the relationship.'<sup>67</sup> Zackel claims that these hierarchies are predicated upon racial difference and indeed, Kirk is human whilst Spock is half Vulcan and Alexander is Macedonian whilst Bagoas is Persian. However these racial differences are not particularly common to intimatopic texts although some kind of hierarchy certainly is. In the case of the appropriative text one might wish to claim that the intimate context goes as far as possible to redress the imported hierarchies, but in fact I do not think this is the case. Instead I think that hierarchy is an intrinsic part of the intimatopic plot, for, if writers do not choose sources which suggest a hierarchy they almost always create their own. Keegan's heroes in *An East Wind Blowing* are the chief's son and an up start peasant, Marion Zimmer Bradley's hero Tommy will always be a "kid"<sup>68</sup> to his partner and lover Mario, Lackey's heroes are separated by age and experience, Nell Warren's *The Wild Man* is about a rich man and a poor boy and her earlier novel, *The Front Runner* is about a running coach and his star athlete. The negotiations that these texts make between their interest in hierarchies and their investments in reciprocity create the tension I have called quasi-egalitarianism. In Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Catch Trap* Tommy reflects that he 'was a grown man[...]and there was no longer any reason his own needs and desires should be subservient to Mario's'.<sup>69</sup> It appears to be an egalitarian relationship, and yet the 'essence' of Tommy and Mario's relationship is its

<sup>65</sup> Ruth Hoberman, 'Masquing the Phallus: Genital Ambiguity in Mary Renault's Historical Novels', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42 (1996), 277-293 (p.285).

<sup>66</sup> Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door* (London: Penguin, 1996), p.237.

<sup>67</sup> Fredrick zackel, 'Robinson Crusoe and the Ethnic Sidekick', *Bright Lights Film Journal*, 30 (2000) on line <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe1.html>>.

<sup>68</sup> Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap*, p.588.

<sup>69</sup> Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap*, p.483.

inbuilt hierarchy which positions Tommy as Mario's 'catcher',<sup>70</sup> the second string to the star act, an essential side kick who is content to stand back and then pick up the pieces. A similar negotiation is found in Patricia Nell Warren's *The Front Runner* in which Harlan Brown, an athletics coach, falls for his star pupil Billy Sive. Harlan does not relinquish his role of coach and controls almost every aspect of Billy's life and yet Warren describes this relationship in egalitarian terms as one in which the two men bound themselves 'in an equality of giving' neither 'the property of the other'.<sup>71</sup> This tension between an implicit hierarchy and reciprocal, apparently egalitarian ideals is so common in K/S fiction that I asked K/S writers about it directly. What they suggested was that 'it's the inequalities, the differences, the lack of balance, the shifting of balance from one side to the other [...] that's erotic'.<sup>72</sup> And to explain their commitment to reciprocity they suggested that I 'think of yin-yang, that beautiful black-white curving-together design, how the large blends into the small, the dot of black in the white, the dot of white in the black -- perfect balance. Equal but not identical'.<sup>73</sup> I believe that within the intimatopic community the reciprocity and intimacy that exists between the heroes is enhanced by the hierarchy it transcends. If Bagoas and Alexander can become intimates despite Bagoas' slavery then, in intimatopia, intimacy can overcome any form of hierarchy and that is one of its attractions. Thus despite the fact that they offer a number of alternative ideologies, intimatopic texts often reinscribe the binaries they appear to be eluding. The question of whether these texts are ultimately conservative or reactionary is therefore very hard to answer. Whilst discussion of the text's negotiation with conservatism is interesting, I ultimately agree with Sinfield that trying to decide if a certain text is 'progressive or reactionary is [...] not a viable project'<sup>74</sup> because it depends too greatly upon context and audience. In the case of intimatopia it may be conservative for some audiences, perhaps queer and feminist ones, and reactionary for other, more heteronormative, audiences. For this reason I shall maintain a neutral and at times indecisive position throughout the following discussion of some of the political implications of intimatopia.

<sup>70</sup> Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap*, p.585.

<sup>71</sup> Nell Warren, *The Front Runner*, p.198.

<sup>72</sup> Jenna, Kirk Spock Heaven, 20 September 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Kathy, Kirk Spock Heaven 19 September 2004.

<sup>74</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics- Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.56.



## Political Issues

Part of the difficulty in labelling intimatopic texts 'reactionary', because of the alternative ideologies that they encode, is their distinct lack of an overt political agenda. Although Moraru suggests that women's rewriting always has a 'political and cultural agenda',<sup>75</sup> that agenda may not be one that is easily allied with existing manifestos. Despite the fact that intimatopic texts are mostly written by women, and that their focus is on relationships between men, intimatopic ideologies might be sympathetic to neither queer nor feminist polemics. Whilst intimatopic ideologies have connections to the 'emotional intimacy' that was valued by the radical feminists of the early 1980s,<sup>76</sup> the genre's focus on men can be seen as distinctly anti-feminist. Carolyn G. Heilbrun's essay 'Axiothea's Grief' which suggests that women who, like Mary Renault, use male protagonists, do so to escape the necessity of dealing with issues like 'female dependence',<sup>77</sup> appears to pre-empt Joanna Russ's feeling that a woman who writes of 'male myths with male protagonists [...] falsifies herself and much of her own experience'.<sup>78</sup> As Constance Penley notes about K/S writers, many 'do not feel they can speak as feminists [and] [...] do not feel that feminism speaks for them'.<sup>79</sup> Many writers feel that they do not need to take on moral or political responsibilities and indeed one writer of romances, criticised for reinscribing a limited vision of female lives, responded angrily, 'these are not self help books, they are fantasies'.<sup>80</sup> Viewed as fantasy or polemic, I do not believe that the intimatopic genre can be considered feminist, even though it is undoubtedly feminine. If there is any sense in which intimatopic texts promote

<sup>75</sup> Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p.143.

<sup>76</sup> Pat Caplan, 'Introduction', in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, ed. by Pat Caplan (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.1-30 (p.10).

<sup>77</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun, 'Axiothea's Grief: The Disability of the Female Imagination', in *From Parnassus*, ed. by Dora B. Weiner and William R. Keylor (London: Harper and Row, 1976), pp.227-236 (p.231).

<sup>78</sup> Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.85.

<sup>79</sup> Constance Penley, 'Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Study of Popular Culture', in *Cultural studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.479-500 (p.492).

<sup>80</sup> Kathleen Gilles Seidel, 'Judge me by the Joy I Bring', in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, ed. by Jayne Ann Krentz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp.159-179 (p.172).



women and their experience it is in the ways in which they disseminate feminine ideologies. Whilst individual writers, like Pat Barker, may feel that their texts have a feminist inflected agenda, this cannot be extended to embrace the whole genre and thus, whilst intimatopic texts may be used to address feminist concerns, the genre as a whole cannot be considered as part of a feminist movement or manifesto. Rather the intimatopic genre should be considered as an independent part of the history of women's writing.

Blum suggests that women writers are not interested in the patterns of male/male doubling which so fascinated male writers like Conrad and Melville, but rather go beyond this male tradition by offering images of male/female doubles.<sup>81</sup> Although, in apparent contradiction, intimatopic texts draw on the very images Blum thinks women's writing rejects, there is an element of truth in her claim; for these women are not writing male/male doubles from a male perspective and in this way they are moving beyond, or at least away from, the male traditions. Whilst, the intimatopic genre should be considered part of the cultural history of same sex representation, it should not be assumed that it reflects male homosexual or queer concerns. Although intimatopic texts may include depictions of homosexual subcultures they often show their own heroes transcending them (see chapter one p.57). Many intimatopic writers who choose to write about a period in which homosexual politics were particularly salient depict historical politics but import intimatopic ideologies. This is very much the case with Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Catch Trap*, which explores the reality of homophobia in 1950s America, yet shows how her heroes manage to 'figure out on [their] own'<sup>82</sup> how to balance the dual expectations of a heterosexist culture and a homosexual subculture, and achieve an intimatopic relationship. Other intimatopic writers use appropriative structures to distance themselves from modern identity politics, which as Alan Sinfield suggests, have tended to narrow same sex interaction down to 'men who are sexually active and attracted to men', excluding the 'deeply emotional bonding'<sup>83</sup> which would be of primary interest to the intimatopic writer. Historical novels may be set before there were

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<sup>81</sup> Joanne Blum, *Transcending Gender: The Male/Female Double in Women's Fiction* (London: UMI Research Press, 1988).

<sup>82</sup> Zimmer Bradley, *The Catch Trap*, p.493.

<sup>83</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Gay and After* (London: Serpents' Tail, 1998), p.11.

recognisable identity politics, or like Renault's Alexander trilogy, they may exploit a bisexual culture. Fantasy novels, science fiction and futuristic texts similarly create worlds where homosexuality is not an issue; Mel Keegan for instance uses her futuristic novel *Aquamarine* to depict a society in which 'no such word existed'.<sup>84</sup> Probably in connection to their ideological commitment to exclusivity, which privatises the homosocial experience, intimatopic texts tend towards depicting intimacy as an esoteric development between two individuals rather than as part of a wider, homosexual, community. As Susan Kay writes about slash fan fiction the love the men share 'is unique in their community and not part of a homosexual subculture'.<sup>85</sup> Ambiguous intimatopias are by their very nature separated from the homosexual subculture, but they, like their sexual counterparts, encode intimacy as unique within the homosocial culture that supports it. Across its various manifestations, the intimatopic genre evades questions of homosexual identity to such an extent that several texts by intimatopic writers have been called homophobic.<sup>86</sup> I suspect that this is due to the fact that although many writers are interested in the history of homosexuality they do not find the usual homosexual or queer perspective resonates with their intimatopic ideologies. In fact to label their characters 'homosexual' would straight away have a negative impact on the intimatopic insistence that friendship and love are deeply connected for in the current western culture, as Miller point out, 'there seems to be a separation between male friendship and homosexuality'.<sup>87</sup>

Another way in which intimatopic ideologies might be considered conservative, or even regressive, from a queer perspective, concerns their moderated eroticism which might be seen as desexualising the male homosexual experience. Although Jonathon Dollimore claims that 'to recover more for the domain of the non-sexual is related to a progressive sexual politics',<sup>88</sup> many

<sup>84</sup> Mel Keegan, *Aquamarine* (Brighton: Gay Men's Press, 2000), p.63.

<sup>85</sup> Susan kray, 'The Things Women Don't Say', in *Science Fiction: Canonization and Marginalization and The Academy*, ed. by Gary Westfahl and George Slusser (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), pp.37-49 (p.41).

<sup>86</sup> Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (Continuum: New York, 1990), p.235.

<sup>87</sup> Stuart Miller, *Men and Friendship* (London: Gateway Books, 1983), p.136.

<sup>88</sup> Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, p.330

would feel that intimatopic ideologies denied the importance of the sexual experience within the homosexual relationship. This fear of the erasure of the sexual is common to both lesbian and homosexual communities and Donna Penn writes angrily about the lesbian continuum and the erasure it seems to perform by claiming that 'sex between women is no longer necessary to the definition of lesbianism'.<sup>89</sup> Terry Castle also feels that sexual lesbianism is erased by the pervasive belief that lesbianism is 'simply another form of "homosocial" bonding'.<sup>90</sup> Intimatopic texts tend towards ideologies in which 'the men are lovers without ever thinking of what they do as "homosexuality"' <sup>91</sup> a position which could certainly be considered homophobic from a queer perspective. Indeed, the charge of 'homophobia' is often levelled at men who, though they may enjoy homosexual sex, reject a homosexual orientation or identity. Alan Sinfield remarks with some irony that these men, despised by many within the gay community, are in fact the real 'dissidents' because it is they who reject the supposed boundaries and classifications.<sup>92</sup> Thus the intimatopic genre might be seen as simultaneously conservative, in its denial of the centrality of sex and its evasion of identities, and reactionary in its insistence on evading classification and its attempted erasure of the supposed boundary between friendship and sexuality. Showalter points out that women in men's books represent 'not what women have felt and experienced but only what men have thought women should be,'<sup>93</sup> a somewhat less pejorative version of this could be applied to the intimatopic genre; it is not about the feelings and experiences of homosexual men, but about the feelings and experiences that women think two men could share. I have stressed several times already how intimatopic writers are interested in, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis puts it, telling male stories 'from the other side'<sup>94</sup> and this is the case here too, for intimatopic texts reflect 'another side' of the history of male interaction. Pat Barker explicitly states her interest in

<sup>89</sup> Donna Penn, 'Queer: Theorizing Politics and History', *Radical History Review*, 62 (1995), 24-42 (p.28).

<sup>90</sup> Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.11.

<sup>91</sup> Russ, *Magic Mommas*, p.98.

<sup>92</sup> Sinfield, *Gay and After*, p.192.

<sup>93</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Toward a Feminist Poetics', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays of Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp.125-143 (p.130).

<sup>94</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth - Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p.110.

offering another version of homosexuality than that offered by gay men when she claims that 'some gay writers represent gay men as a large cock and that isn't the story'.<sup>95</sup> Intimatopic texts exist in parallel to gay and queer texts and they offer an alternative history of the cultural representation of love between men. Whilst the work of queer theorists has gone a long way towards elucidating the cultural history of male homosexuality, it has focused on works by gay men telling their stories. As I have shown, however, these queer texts are not the only positive twentieth century representation of intimacy between men and however distanced from much male authored fiction, history and criticism about interaction between men the intimatopic genre is nonetheless an important contribution. Jose Arroyo writes that 'most discourses on homosexuality have focused on the sexual element. The emotive has [...] been repressed'<sup>96</sup> but intimatopic texts are writing the emotive back into the sexual and extending love between men beyond the homosexual sphere and into ambiguous intimacies. As such, although it may not be part of a queer history, the intimatopic genre does form an important part of the history of same sex representation in the last 60 years.

Many of the issues raised by the intimatopic genre concern the question of who owns the 'rights' to representing male experience and homosexuality. With Lars Eighner claiming that 'gay erotica cannot be co-opted'<sup>97</sup> and writers like Mel Keegan defying any such assumption, it is important to remember that intimatopic texts are not really trying to represent homosexuality or gay experience, instead they are exploring their own take on intimacy between men. Stephen Maddison asks 'who is appropriating who when [...]women write about apparently gay sexuality in their own terms'<sup>98</sup> and Bacon Smith asks what happens when gays are represented 'by writers that mean well but do not share in

<sup>95</sup> Donna Perry, 'Going Home Again: An Interview With Pat Barker' *The Literary Review*, 34 (1991) 235-244 (p.243).

<sup>96</sup> José Arroyo, 'Death Desire and Identity: The Political Unconscious of New Queer Cinema', in *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angelica R Wilson (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), pp.70-96 (p.81).

<sup>97</sup> Lars Eighner, *Lavender Blue: How to Write and Sell Gay Men's Erotica* (Texas: Caliente Press, 1987), p.211.

<sup>98</sup> Stephen Maddison, *Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters: Gender Dissent and Heterosocial bonds in Gay Culture* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.97.



a knowledge of the internal life of the gay male character'?<sup>99</sup> But, in the case of the intimatopic genre, these questions can be answered by the insistence that these writers are not writing about 'gay sexuality' or 'gay characters', they are writing about alternative same sex interactions, which, although they may be superficially similar are in fact quite distinct. Although a feeling persists, 'that this kind of territory, like war, is off limits to women writers'<sup>100</sup> intimatopic texts have created a space for themselves, which is neither heterosexist nor queer. Just as the genre does not separate the intimate from the sexual, its texts, written by lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women from a variety of cultures, do not fall neatly into existing categories.

### Antecedents

Intimatopic texts seemed to peak in the seventies, a time during which hegemonic ideologies, in their dual concern for a softer, more 'feminine', masculinity<sup>101</sup> and for interpersonal intimacy, resonated particularly strongly with intimatopic ideals. This was also the time when feminist ideologies came closest to intimatopic ones; substitute men and brotherhood, for women and sisterhood, and this description of the 60s/70s feminist outlook could describe intimatopic ideologies: 'two women's strongest emotions and affection are directed towards each other. It [the relationship] becomes a synonym for sisterhood, solidarity and affection' which sometimes evolves into a 'semi-mystical bonding where bodily contact and genital pleasure are secondary or even non-existent'.<sup>102</sup> Since the 1970s, when feminist ideals tended towards emphasising connections between love and friendship, the ideological perspective has swung back towards separation, a shift which began in the late 1980s and continues to hold sway today.<sup>103</sup> But the cultural climate of the 1970s

<sup>99</sup> Bacon Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, p.144.

<sup>100</sup> Blake Morrison, 'War Stories: What Booker Prize Winner Pat Barker sees in Soldiers', *New Yorker*, 22 (1996), 78-82 (p.80).

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and The Flight From Commitment*, (London: Pluto Press, 1983).

<sup>102</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, 'Questions of Identity', in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, ed. by Pat Caplan (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.31-51 (p.44 and p.46).

<sup>103</sup> Alison Oran, 'Telling Stories about the Ladies of Llangollen: The Construction of Lesbian and Feminist Histories', in *Re-Presenting The Past: Women and History*, ed. by Ann Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska and Louise Ryan (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Shelia Jeffreys, *The*



did not create the intimatopic genre, for Mary Renault was writing intimatopic novels long before the 1960s. Interestingly Renault herself has had a considerable influence on later manifestations of the genre as, if a K/S fan had read male/male romances prior to writing or reading K/S it was *always* one of Renault's intimatopic novels. But the history of intimatopia predates Renault as well and has its roots in the literature associated with a very male tradition: the homosocial American romance in which two men may share a 'fleshless' but 'sacred marriage'.<sup>104</sup> Written in America during the nineteenth century, these texts, the most famous of which are by Cooper, Melville, Twain and Whitman, depict intensely loyal and loving, although non-sexual, relationships between men. Leslie Fiedler, whose essay written in 1957, 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in Huck Honey',<sup>105</sup> was the first to explore the ambiguous nature of these texts, claims that 'in every generation of our own writers the archetype reappears, refracted, half understood, but *there*'.<sup>106</sup> Certainly if the ambiguity of this archetype is reflected anywhere in today's generation of writers, it is, most clearly, in the intimatopic genre. The influence may not be direct however and is quite possibly filtered through the popularity of so called 'buddy' movies, which as Vito Russo points out, tend to demonstrate a more tolerant attitude towards intimate male friendship than that of culture itself.<sup>107</sup> Whether by direct influence, or filtered through other sources, the fact that the nineteenth century American romance finds itself echoed within the modern intimatopic genre is due to the way in which it resonates so strongly with intimatopic ideologies.

American romances represent some of the most famous examples of literary ambiguity regarding sexual matters and are replete with a familiar combination of intimate and erotic cues. Although it is important to remember that within their own historical and cultural context, these texts may not have signalled the eroticism they now suggest, they nonetheless present the modern

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*Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective of the Lesbian sexual Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, 1994).

<sup>104</sup> April Shelley, "'I have Been and Ever Shall Be Your Friend": *Star Trek*, The Deerslayer and the American Romance', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20 (1986), 84-104 (p.97).

<sup>105</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics* (The Beacon Press: Boston 1957)

<sup>106</sup> Fiedler, *An End to Innocence*, p149; See also Moraru, *Rewriting*, p.4.

<sup>107</sup> Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (London: Harper and Row, 1987).

reader with intimate relationships characterised by a surprising degree of physicality. In Melville's *Moby Dick*, for example, Ishmael and Queequeg share a bed:

We had lain thus in bed, chatting and napping at short intervals, and Queequeg now and then affectionately throwing his brown tattooed legs over mine, and then drawing them back; so entirely sociable and free and easy were we.<sup>108</sup>

Intimate cues such as 'chatting' and 'sociable' jostle with erotic cues, from the bed itself, to the image of tangled legs. The traditional American romance represented male intimacy as an heroic ideal uncomplicated by sexual attraction, one whose ambiguity resonates particularly well with the moderated eroticism of intimatopic texts. Its emphasis on mental, rather than physical, bonding as central to homosocial interaction finds expression in texts where men like Huck and Jim, 'talked about all kinds of things'<sup>109</sup> in much the same sociable way as Ishmael and Queequeg. Intimatopic texts, both sexual and ambiguous, share with the ambiguous American romance an interest in homosocial societies in which social isolation is juxtaposed against interpersonal intimacy. The American romance makes use of settings which represent a homosocial world separated from the heterosocial world of civilised society. In all cases the scene of male bonding is one of separation and isolation, Whitman's poem 'Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand' provides the reader with list of possibilities:

[... ]just possibly with you on a high hill, first  
watching lest any person for miles around  
approach unawares,  
Or possibly with you sailing at sea, or on a beach of  
the sea or some quiet island.  
Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you.<sup>110</sup>

In each case Whitman's settings suggest the 'immensity of water' or the 'virgin forest' that Leslie Fiedler claims were central to the genre of American romance.<sup>111</sup> This pattern is also common to more recent popular manifestations

<sup>108</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (1851, repr. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), p.47.

<sup>109</sup> Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884, repr. London: Penguin, 1985), p.179.

<sup>110</sup> Walt Whitman, 'Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand', in *Walt Whitman: Leaves of Grass: Authoritative Texts, Prefaces, Whitman on his art, Criticism*, ed. by Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), pp.115-117 (p.116, l.17-19).

<sup>111</sup> Fiedler, *An End to Innocence*, p148.

of this genre, in which the 'final frontier' of space parallels the American frontier explored by Hawk-eye and his intimate friend Chingachgook in Cooper's *Leather Stocking Tales*. Fiedler suggests that these wildernesses function as a 'disavowal of the conventional and make possible all versions of love',<sup>112</sup> and just as they do in intimatopic texts, these homosocial settings function to contextualise intimacy. The heroes of the American Romance are, like intimatopic heroes, often depicted as outcasts. In the traditional American romance it is the ethnic other who is most obviously 'outside the world of [...]civilisation'.<sup>113</sup> However, in Fiedler's original reading of the genre it is the white man, with whom he forms a bond, who plays 'the role of outcast'.<sup>114</sup> Out on the river in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Huck felt that 'It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars' and against this background of social isolation, Jim tells Huck 'you's the bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de *only* fren' ole Jim's got now'.<sup>115</sup> Here in this nineteenth century genre of fiction is a familiar privatisation of the homosocial experience one through which the outcast status of each hero intensifies the bond they share. Unsurprisingly perhaps, nineteenth century American literature also encodes the pervasive structure of hurt/comfort. Leslie Fiedler describes the fantasy that the American Romance articulates, in which:

Our dark skinned beloved will take us in, we assure ourselves, when we have been cut off, or have cut ourselves off, from all others, without rancour or the insult of forgiveness. He will fold us in his arms saying, "Honey" or "Aikane"; he will comfort us, as if our offence against him were long ago remitted.<sup>116</sup>

Although this particular description is tied to a very specific racial interaction, scenes reminiscent of the hurt/comfort typical of the intimatopic genre are common in the nineteenth century American romance. For instance at the end of *The Last of the Mohicans*, when Chihgachgook is grieving for his son, Hawk-eye takes his hand and claims 'the boy has left us for a time, but, Sagamore, you are not alone'. The physical cue of a hand offered 'in the warmth of feeling' adds to the intimacy of the following description in which the two men 'bowed their

<sup>112</sup> Fiedler, *An End to Innocence*, p148.

<sup>113</sup> Robert K. Martin, *Hero Captain Stranger, Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Novels of Herman Melville* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p.4.

<sup>114</sup> Fiedler, *An End to Innocence*, p150.

<sup>115</sup> Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p.179, p.146.

<sup>116</sup> Fiedler, *An End to Innocence*, p.150.

heads together' and shed 'scalding tears' in shared grief.<sup>117</sup> The way in which hurt, here grief, is used to permit a physical gesture which, at least to modern reader, enhances the apparent intimacy of the moment is very similar to the ways in which hurt/comfort is used by the modern intimatopic text. American romances show a familiar connection between love, friendship and intimacy and although the American romance seems unable 'to imagine what it might have been like for two men to love each other *and survive*'<sup>118</sup> intimatopic texts both ambiguous and sexual are busy writing beyond this ending.

The American romance, though the most salient and cohesive, is far from the only antecedent of intimatopic texts. Mary Renault discovered that Plato's dialogues had many similarities to modern day intimatopias, and even Shakespeare's sonnets with their focus on the 'marriage of true minds,'<sup>119</sup> might be considered an antecedent to the modern genre. From their prominence in nineteenth century American fiction, intimatopic antecedents can be traced from Whitman to his English disciple Edward Carpenter. Although Carpenter's version is more sexualised than that of his American antecedents, describing erotic relationships in which 'the sensuous element, though present is exquisitely subordinated to the spiritual',<sup>120</sup> his poetry showcases his interest in intimatopic ideologies. Here Carpenter offers images of 'souls [...] knit together' and connections between love and friendship find expression in his 'Oh Joy divine of friends!' which clearly describes a sexual relationship under the rubric of friendship.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, showing an ideological perspective strikingly similar to that of the intimatopic community, Carpenter writes that, 'love and friendship which have been so often set apart from one another as things distinct[...]are in reality closely related and shade imperceptibly into each other'.<sup>122</sup> Although, the

<sup>117</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826 repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.394

<sup>118</sup> Martin, *Hero Captain Stranger*, p.7.

<sup>119</sup> *The Penguin Shakespeare, The Sonnets, and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. by G.B. Harrison (London: Penguin Books, 1948), p.82, l.1.

<sup>120</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A study of Some Transitional Types of Man and Woman* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1909), p.34.

<sup>121</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1917), p.397, p.410.

<sup>122</sup> Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* p.18. I wonder if the use of friendship language to describe sexual interaction during the time when homosexuality as being defined is part of the reason why intimate friendship became suspicious?



intimatopic tradition is clearly a long one interestingly, it is only in the last 60 years, since as Das described it, 'sexuality[...]hijacked an intimate history of human emotions',<sup>123</sup> that this tradition has become predominantly associated with women's writing. During this period increasing numbers of women have been working with the ambiguous structures common to intimatopic antecedents, thus disproving Russ's assertion that 'women cannot write using the old myths'.<sup>124</sup> Many intimatopic writers are now finding a resonance between their twenty/twenty first century feminine ideologies and historically male ideologies, perhaps because, in the intervening years, ideals such as intimate friendship, loyalty and bonding have come to seem more feminine than masculine. In parallel to this, the masculine homoerotic tradition has become one in which frankness about sexual matters tends to separate intimacy and friendship from the more graphically sexual. This is partly the result of the increasing openness about homosexuality, which has meant that those male writers who wished to explore such themes no longer need to couch their texts in terms of intimate friendship. Indeed, Eric Garber mentions that since the 1970s, many male writers who had been using ambiguous formations, 'transformed them into something new and often openly gay'.<sup>125</sup> Whilst some writers clearly revelled in their new found freedom to centralise the sexual, for those male writers who wished to explore male friendship, it became harder to address intimacy between men without seeming to evoke the sexual. Indeed, as Elizabeth Stewart points out, 'the increasing visibility of homosexuality [...] led to a societal suspicion of male relationships'.<sup>126</sup> Peter Nardi is similarly insistent that during the last 100 years 'as distinctions began to be made between homosexuality and heterosexuality[...] the stigma attached to same sex touch and intimacy grew'.<sup>127</sup> This stigma, which may often prevent men from writing intimatopic texts, seems to have had less impact on female writers, for women have used the increasing

<sup>123</sup> Santanu Das, "'Kiss Me Hardy'" Intimacy, Gender and Gesture in World War I Trench Literature', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9 (2002), 51-74 (p.69).

<sup>124</sup> Russ, *To Write Like a Woman*, p.93.

<sup>125</sup> Eric Garber, 'The Best of Gay Sci-Fi and Fantasy', in *Homosexual Themes in Literary Studies Vol VIII*, ed. by Wayne R Dynes and Stephen Donaldson (London: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp.145-151 (p.147).

<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Lesbian and Gay Theology of Relationships* (London: Mowbray, 1995), p.43.

<sup>127</sup> Peter Nardi, 'Seamless Souls: An Introduction to Men's Friendships', in *Men's Friendships*, ed. by Peter Nardi (London: Sage, 1992), pp.1-44 (p.3).



freedom of expression in literature and culture to begin their own exploration of intimacy between men.

### Women's Literature?

Despite its male authored antecedents, modern intimatopic texts are mostly written by women and thus form part of the corpus of twentieth century women's writing. Why this genre of women's literature has not been explored by academics before is something of a puzzle; perhaps, as I suggested in the introduction, it is because studies of women's writing have tended to focus on the representation of women. Nonetheless a few accounts have come close to uniting these texts, though in different ways. Lichtenberg's genre of 'intimate adventure', certainly comes close to my investigation of intimatopia, although it stops short of offering a detailed account of textual features and denies any antecedent influences prior to 1967, insisting that *Star Trek* is solely responsible for the genre's emergence. James D Reamer, who writes about homosexuality in Sci-Fi and fantasy, also brings together a number of intimatopic texts; he notes their shared features, including the connection of friendship and love, the spiritual bonding and the gender blending of the male characters, but strangely he never comments on the fact that almost all the texts he discusses are written by women.<sup>128</sup> I began this thesis with Elaine Showalter's question, 'what is *the difference* of women's writing?'<sup>129</sup> and although it is clear that there is not a single unitary difference it is equally clear that women's writing, such as that showcased by intimatopic texts, does offer divergent ideological perspectives. It is also clear that intimatopic texts demonstrate so many shared interpretive strategies that they, and the women who write them can be linked. The fact of these shared ideologies may raise questions as to the essential nature of female aesthetics, but it is clear that the intimatopic perspective is shared only amongst a limited number of women, and, whilst it appears similar in different western cultures, it certainly cannot be assumed to be shared by all women. Indeed, as a

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<sup>128</sup> James D. Reamer, 'Homosexuality in Science Fiction and Fantasy', in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.145-161.

<sup>129</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 179-250 (p.185).

casual perusal of *Switch Hitters*,<sup>130</sup> a collection of short stories by lesbians who write gay erotica and homosexual men who write lesbian erotica, makes clear, women are quite capable of writing all kinds of literature about male interaction. Although it is abundantly clear that women may write about relationships between men in many ways which are not intimatopic, the question remains as to whether intimatopic perspectives are unique to women. Dianna Fuss sensibly asks if it is ever possible to speak of “the female reader” or “the male reader” [...] as if these categories were not already transgressed [...] by other areas of difference<sup>131</sup> and I do not think it really is possible to discuss the ‘the female writer’ in isolation. Indeed, I have tried to avoid the terms male and female, preferring masculine and feminine in acknowledgement that men can have feminine traits just as women can have masculine ones. However, I can offer some generalisations about intimatopic texts which, which like any generalisations, address averages rather than individuals, but nonetheless suggest that intimatopic texts share features which are most frequently exploited by women and reflect ideologies that are more common amongst women than men.

Despite the fact that the majority of intimatopic texts are written by women, it is important to recognise that men can and do write them as well.<sup>132</sup> One such male author is Armistead Maupin, whose *The Night Listener* features the ambiguous relationship between a man and a teenage boy who are ‘kindred Spirits’<sup>133</sup> and who share long and extremely intimate telephone conversations which epitomise face-to-face communication. Although the text plays with notions of truth and reality and the relationship may be entirely imaginary depending on how the novel is read, it nonetheless encodes an intimatopic fantasy. Another male authored intimatopia is Paul Monnette’s *Half Way Home* in which the hero longs to ‘be known [...] the quirks and the edges, the bumps

<sup>130</sup> *Switch Hitters: Lesbians Write Gay Male Erotica and Gay Men Write Lesbian Erotica*, ed. by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel (California: Cleis Press, 1996).

<sup>131</sup> Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.28.

<sup>132</sup> Perhaps these writers are the modern day counterparts of Carpenters ‘uranian’ men who had some feminine sensibilities and for whom, according to Carpenter, love was ‘gentler, more considerate, more a matter of the heart and less one of mere physical satisfaction than that of ordinary men’. Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, p.128.

<sup>133</sup> Armistead Maupin, *The Night Listener* (London: Black Swan, 2001), p.11.

and the hollows - I want somebody to see it all whole'.<sup>134</sup> In this novel, the fantasy is realised by the intimate and sexual relationship that develops between the narrator and Gray. Although both these texts are unusual by intimatopic standards, for instance in their overt engagement with homosexual identity politics and the reality of AIDS, they nevertheless demonstrate a similar ideological perspective in which intimacy is the longed for ideal. Allen J Frantzen, a male historian, also demonstrates an intimatopic perspective when he writes that for him, 'life is more interesting, pleasurable, and meaningful if its erotic potential can be expanded across a spectrum that includes but is not restricted to the sexual'.<sup>135</sup> It is possible that within a homosexual interpretive community the intimatopic ideal might parallel what Bruce Bowrer calls gay men's 'dream of an innocent first love' which nostalgically approximates their first crush involving something of friendship and something of desire.<sup>136</sup> Thus, though perhaps for different reasons, the intimatopic perspective finds expression in texts by both men and women. Nevertheless it remains true that the vast majority of intimatopic texts are written by women and that apparently similar texts by men tend to demonstrate a very different ideological perspective.

Although David Alderson claims that Alan Hollinghurst's novels find 'appealing' the 'integration [...] of gay desire into broader social structures and relations',<sup>137</sup> they are quite different from sexual intimatopias. Hollinghurst's most famous novel *The Swimming Pool Library* explores a number of casual sexual encounters but ends with the hero and narrator still alone and unattached. Sex rather than intimacy is of central importance for the hero who finds that his 'mindless randyness' was always a counterpoint to his 'sentimentality',<sup>138</sup> and the ideological perspective is one which suggests that 'there is nothing worse than making a bid for someone's body and getting their soul *instead*'.<sup>139</sup> Joseph

<sup>134</sup> Paul Monette, *Halfway Home* (London: The Gay Men's Press, 1999), p.32.

<sup>135</sup> Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same Sex Love From 'Beowulf' to 'Angels In America'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.292.

<sup>136</sup> Bruce Bawer, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), p.201.

<sup>137</sup> David Alderson, 'Desire as Nostalgia: The Novels of Alan Hollinghurst', in *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*, ed. by David Alderson and Linda Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.29-48 (p.35).

<sup>138</sup> Alan Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library* (London: Vintage, 1998), p.31.

<sup>139</sup> Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library*, p.127.

Hansen's novels which were recommended to me as being similar to the intimatopic texts I was exploring are also remarkably different. In these novels the male protagonists struggle to make meaningful connections and fail to love one another 'under [their] real identities'<sup>140</sup> because of their failure to really communicate. As I have already suggested in this thesis the most striking difference between masculine and feminine ideologies often occurs in the representation of love and friendship and it is interesting that a gay man who initially appears to share an intimatopic perspective, claiming that he distrusts the 'radical discontinuity between sexuality and friendship' offers, as the male image which connects the two, the 'fuckbuddy'.<sup>141</sup> This term in fact describes something which would be anathema to the intimatopic community, for the fuckbuddy is 'someone with whom one has a relationship which is based purely on sex rather than on friendship or love'.<sup>142</sup> It is quite striking that in this term the use of the friendship cue 'buddy' denies intimacy, whereas in intimatopic texts friendship cues enhance intimacy. This is probably based upon a fundamental difference in the way men and women generally conceive of friendship, which is often seen as more intimate and emotional for women than it is for men. In conclusion, whilst my thesis has asked whether women write differently to men, it is only on a small scale that it has been able to answer that, yes, on average, a number of them do. I have asked in which ways women might write differently to men and I have found that the most salient differences occur in their representation of connections between love and friendship and their desire to unite the erotic and the intimate across the cultural faultline which so often attempts to separate them. Du Plessis's attitude seems sensible here, since, although most intimatopic texts are written by women, like her, I 'cannot prove that only women, [...]use this aesthetic'<sup>143</sup> and in fact I can prove that, whilst it is not common, a limited number of men do.

<sup>140</sup> Joseph Hansen, *Death Claims* (Harpenden: No Exit Press, 1973), p.36.

<sup>141</sup> Mark Blasius, 'Contemporary Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Theories and Their Politics.', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (1998), pp.642-674 (p.651).

<sup>142</sup> *A Queer Companion: A Rough Guide to Gay Slang*, ed. by M.J. Ellison and Charles T. Fosberry (London: Abson Books, 1996), p.17.

<sup>143</sup> Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'For the Etruscans', in *The New Feminist Criticism*, pp.271-291 (p.283).



## Why do Women Write Intimatopic Texts?

Although I believe that there is little profit in privileging the 'why' over the 'how', having thoroughly investigated how the intimatopic text is constructed, I will offer a few thoughts as to why. One of the aims of this thesis was to contribute to the wider debate about women's writing and to ask if their writing is shaped by a 'specifically feminine psychology'<sup>144</sup> and the predilections it has for specific representations; I believe that it is in asking why women write intimatopic texts that I come closest to addressing these questions. Many appropriative intimatopias begin from ambiguous sources and it is the lure of ambiguity that I believe is the initial inspiration for these texts. The fascination of sources which hint at, but do not fully articulate, sexual matters is probably universal and shared by both men and women; indeed Barthes claims that it is one of the key pleasures of reading: he writes, 'is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes?'<sup>145</sup> The partial exposure that invites interpretation and creative intervention is typical of the ambiguous text whose words as Tennyson says of his own ambiguous poem 'In Memoriam', 'half reveal/and half conceal the soul within'.<sup>146</sup> Hayden White emphasises how, in contrast, something with very little ambiguity 'intimidates rather than invites imaginative identification'.<sup>147</sup> Whilst it is easy to see why appropriative writers are drawn to ambiguous sources, the same attraction might account for writers of non-appropriative intimatopias as well, for these writers may be drawn to the ambiguities suggested by the cultural faultline between the intimate and the sexual. Alan Sinfield claims that a cultural faultline will always invite re-working, because of its very instability, which provokes writers into 'trying to get it back into shape, back into the old shape if [they] are conservative minded, or into a new shape if [they] are more adventurous'.<sup>148</sup> Intimatopic texts,

<sup>144</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.15.

<sup>145</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.9.

<sup>146</sup> Alfred Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', in *Alfred Lord Tennyson: Selected Poems*, ed. by Aidan Day (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.130-224 (p.133, v.v, l. 3-4).

<sup>147</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.21.

<sup>148</sup> Sinfield, *Cultural Politics*, p.4.



ambiguous and sexual, appropriative and original, re-encode the ambiguities found in the cultural 'text' of the faultline between the sexual and the intimate, using creative intervention to connect its two binaries. It is in this distinctive intervention that intimatopic texts move away from the universal towards the feminine, for research into reading has suggested that women are particularly adept at resolving tensions and forming consistent patterns of meaning.<sup>149</sup>

On a very general level, Kathy Mezei suggests that, 'women writers' have been particularly attracted to writing 'beyond the ending',<sup>150</sup> but how this is achieved by individual writers is likely to be the result their exposure to different interpretive communities. Aul and Mendleson claim that retelling is about the 'desire to do better than the previous teller of the tale - better at least for your particular audience',<sup>151</sup> and this is what is occurring when the intimatopic writer rewrites the ambiguous source, be it historical, textual, or cultural; they are making it 'better' for the intimatopic community. In order to do this they begin by reshaping the text in ways which resonate with cultural competencies common amongst many women and combined in distinctive ways within the intimatopic interpretive community. Psychological and sociological research has suggested that women are particularly good at making inferences about 'human relationships',<sup>152</sup> and that they are competent at developing friendships characterised by intimacy, 'self revelation, nurturance, [...] emotional support',<sup>153</sup> and 'face-to-face',<sup>154</sup> communication. Media fan fiction writers have often been conceived of as 'poachers' who steal that which seems 'most pertinent to their social and cultural experience',<sup>155</sup> and intimatopic writers are likewise using

<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth A. Flynn, 'Gender and Reading', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patricinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp.267-288 (p.272).

<sup>150</sup> Kathy Mezei, 'Introduction: Contextualising Feminist Narratology', in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. by Kathy Mezei (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp.1-20 (p.7).

<sup>151</sup> Billie Aul with Farah Mendlesohn, 'Popular Science, Rewriting and Utopia: Or The Revolution Will not Take Place in a Fanzine', *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*, 74 (1998) 80-95 (p.87).

<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth A. Flynn, 'Introduction', in *Gender and Reading*, pp.ix-xxx (p.xxvi).

<sup>153</sup> Lynn C. Spangler, 'Buddies and Pals: a History of Male Friendships on Prime Time Television', in *Men Masculinity and the Media*, ed. by Steve Craig (London: Sage, 1992), pp.93-110 (p.95).

<sup>154</sup> Nardi, *Men's Friendships*, p.5.

<sup>155</sup> Henry Jenkins, 'If I could Speak with your Sound: Fan Music, Textual Poaching and Liminal Identification', *Camera Obscura*, 23 (1990), 149-175 (p.167).

cultural competencies which are valued within their communities. Intimatopic texts are, in the majority, written by women because they reflect issues women have been socialised to value; these familiar competencies are then encoded into relationships between men and it is there, in the unexpected context of the homosocial, that they seem particularly unique. Although Felski insists on scepticism towards 'any claim that women are more likely to write in a particular style because of the existence of specifically feminine psychology',<sup>156</sup> in a limited sense this does appear to be the case. Although I would modify 'specifically' to 'generally' I do believe that the genre of intimatopia is shaped by culturally induced psychological predispositions which are commonly considered feminine. In this way whilst its representation of intimacy between men runs counter to hegemonic ideologies about male interaction, and masculine ideologies about interpersonal relationships, it reflects a number of feminine ideologies, shaped by cultural competencies common to many women.

If, as psychological research suggests, it is generally a feminine competency to perceive interpersonal relationships in terms of social connection,<sup>157</sup> and 'empathy',<sup>158</sup> then these competencies can be found reflected in a wide range of women's literature including the intimatopic. Although this spectrum is much broader than the intimatopic genre, it is possible to see how the same competencies might create texts in several genres all espousing intimacy, reciprocity and exclusivity. When these common competencies are combined with rarer predispositions, the uniquely structured intimatopic text begins to take shape. Elizabeth Stuart, highlights one of these rarer predispositions, when she suggests that at least some women are 'prepared to acknowledge an erotic element to their friendships'<sup>159</sup> a predisposition which finds expression in the connection between love, friendship and intimacy so central to the intimatopic genre. Biological research highlights another of these rarer predispositions, in which women may find 'intimacy is required before the development of a sexual

<sup>156</sup> Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, p.19.

<sup>157</sup> Drury Sherrod, 'The Bonds of Men: Problems and Possibilities in Close Male Relationships', in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. by Harry Brod (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp.213-239 (p.222, p.234).

<sup>158</sup> David Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 1998), p.302, p.175 and p.173

<sup>159</sup> Stuart, *Just Good Friends*, p.52.

relationship,<sup>160</sup> this finds expression in the moderated eroticism of the intimatopic text. The way in which intimatopic texts arise from the cultural competencies and predispositions of their writers is consistent with the pattern discovered by Alan Mckee in which interpretation is always filtered through cultural schemata, even in cases where this requires considerable creative intervention. Mckee found that when indigenous Australians were shown the film of *Rocky* they understood it through their own schema which centralised ancestral ties and that, although 'to a European viewer [...].Rocky's grandmother doesn't exist; to an indigenous viewer she is off screen and must be placed in the story'.<sup>161</sup> And this is similar to the case of intimatopic encodings which, beginning in cultural competencies and psychological predispositions, are ultimately shaped by the schema of interpersonal intimacy which is so valued within intimatopic interpretive communities. This process reflects the hypotheses of cognitive psychologists who suggest that 'comprehension is mediated by general knowledge structures or schema, that exist in the mind of the reader'.<sup>162</sup> Thus within the intimatopic community comprehension and hence encoding of relationships between men is structured around the ever present schema of intimacy. In this way a particular combination of competencies, predispositions and schemas, is what distinguishes the intimatopic interpretive community from other interpretive communities of women who may combine and express them in different ways. Men do not write intimatopic texts as often as women do simply because fewer of them share the cultural competencies, predispositions and schema to do so, on average they are more attuned to the concerns of other genres. Radway, Jenkins and Penley all describe women writing about men in terms similar to Radway's as, 'the imaginative transformation of masculinity to conform with female standards',<sup>163</sup> but I do not think it is as deliberate as that implies. Rather, I hypothesise that when women write about men they apply their own competencies, predispositions and schema to the task. Claire M. Tylee implies that literature 'embodies the ideology that governs people's

<sup>160</sup> Geary, *Male, Female*, p.131. Although this research addressed biological sex differences, I see no reason why its conclusions need not be interpreted as evidence of cultural as much as biological similarities experienced by women.

<sup>161</sup> Alan Mckee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginners Guide* (London: Sage, 2003), p.65.

<sup>162</sup> Flynn, 'Introduction', p.xii.

<sup>163</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.147.

understanding of the world they live in'<sup>164</sup> and this is certainly the case with intimatopic fiction; it embodies ideologies that through competencies, predispositions and schema are characteristic of the intimatopic community and govern their understandings of interpersonal interaction. Throughout their shared ideologies and textual features, intimatopic texts are governed by what Iser terms the 'familiar world'<sup>165</sup> of the intimatopic writer and this is why the genre is predominantly written by women.

### Why Are They About Two Men?

The question remains as to why these predilections are expressed in representations of relationships between men where they run counter to so many masculine ideologies. Intimatopic texts highlight the point I made in the introduction that a women's consciousness does not need a female mouthpiece to find its way into a text, but why are these women choosing a male mouthpiece instead? It is possible that relationships between two men might be attractive to women because, as readers and writers, they can become involved on two levels via both identification and desire. That women have no trouble identifying with male characters in fiction is suggested by ethnographic research about readers of romance novels who identify with both hero and heroine, particularly 'during love scenes' which 'the reader experiences [...] as both seducer and seduced'.<sup>166</sup> The paired experiences of identification and desire are, according to some theorists, central to the popularity of literary texts like *The Thorn Birds* in which Cora Kaplan suggests the feminine hero and masculine heroine facilitate involvement from 'a variety of subject positions'.<sup>167</sup> Although these are all heterosexual texts, theorists believe that female readers will readily 'identify with one or both protagonists' within 'a male / male romance'.<sup>168</sup> In the case of the intimatopic text, the characteristic gender blending of its heroes might facilitate

<sup>164</sup> Claire M. Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings 1914-64* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.251.

<sup>165</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A theory of Aesthetic Response*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.282.

<sup>166</sup> Jayne Ann Krentz, 'Introduction', in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, ed. by Jayne Anne Krentz (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp.1-14 (p.7).

<sup>167</sup> Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), p.120.

<sup>168</sup> Salmon and Symons, *Warrior Lovers*, p.79



this dual involvement, their 'feminine' qualities encouraging identification<sup>169</sup> and their 'masculine' ones encouraging desire. It is possible that, in being able to identify with these male heroes, the female reader or writer feels that she is able to 'realise the maleness in herself',<sup>170</sup> the closest she can come to being a man, or at least a woman's ideological notion of a man. The fluid possibilities for identification and desire offered to women by the homosocial or homoerotic text is certainly one of the reasons why some women are drawn to exploring intimacy through interactions between men.

The male bond also provides women with alternatives to the traditional male/ female relationship allowing them the freedom, denied by the romantopic text, to question the 'primacy of [...] [heterosexual] relationships'.<sup>171</sup> Radway writes of how 'the erasure of boundaries and loss of singular consciousness achieved through union with an individual indistinguishable from the self'<sup>172</sup> is a recurring preoccupation of romance novels, but for many women this desire may be easier to encode into relationships between men, where an essential similarity is already suggested by the same sex element. Annis Pratt writes about how hard it is to create heterosexual love relationships which achieve 'androgynous reciprocity',<sup>173</sup> and slash writer Maygra claims that, 'there is a connection between two men that [...] a man and a woman can never achieve'.<sup>174</sup> The intimatopic ideal of mental union is perhaps easier to imagine in a same sex context supported by a homosocial background, with its emphasis on loyalty and comradeship. Despite this, and although all the texts I have looked at here are about interpersonal relationships between men, I do not believe it is impossible to create a cross sex intimatopia, indeed, sections from Mary Renault's *The Bull From the Sea*, encode just such a possibility. In this novel it is Theseus and his female companion and lover Hippolyta between whom 'it never needed speech

<sup>169</sup> This was certainly the case for Cora Kaplan in her reading of *The Thorn Birds* in which she found herself identifying with an 'ideal maternal man'. Kaplan, *Sea Changes*, p.120.

<sup>170</sup> Laura Kinsdale, 'The Androgynous Reader: Point of View in the Romance', In *Dangerous Men*, pp.31-44 (p.37).

<sup>171</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.113.

<sup>172</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.155.

<sup>173</sup> Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p.57.

<sup>174</sup> Maygra de Rhema, 'Being my Own Hero', On line <<http://wordsmiths.net/essays.html>>.



[...]to share[...]thought'.<sup>175</sup> These two are clearly friends as well as lovers and are described as 'equal war comrades', but in the end 'only one was King' and she sacrificed her life to save his.<sup>176</sup> This sacrificial death does not disqualify the relationship as intimatopic, indeed it was a common feature of the genre's nineteenth century antecedents and is echoed in several modern texts. Thus, whilst this heterosexual relationship is only central for half the novel, it has all the markings of an intimatopic interaction. Anne Cranny-Francis describes the work of *Star Trek* novelist, Jean Lorrah, as using 'merging and sharing' in 'a vision of heterosexual intimacy which is fundamentally non-patriarchal'<sup>177</sup> and Lorrah's fiction, both professional and amateur, although always heterosexual, might also be intimatopic in design. Interestingly I have yet to read an ambiguous heterosocial intimatopia, perhaps the supposed inevitability of sexual attraction between men and women who are intimate is such a forgone conclusion that the ambiguous text is almost impossible to create. The assumption that sex is central to relationships between men and women may also deter intimatopic writers, for whom intimacy rather than sexual attraction is of primary importance. Although I have not explored it in this thesis, I suspect that intimatopia also has a female/female version, indeed the long tradition of romantic friendship between women offers a number of ambiguous antecedents and sources. Sarah Waters' modern novels about love between women certainly include a longing for intimatopic interaction. Although in Waters' novels, the longing for intimacy is frequently thwarted, the vivid depiction in *Affinity* of Margaret's love for Selina, which is encoded as 'a quivering cord of dark matter'<sup>178</sup> that Margaret believes unites their spirits has a distinctly intimatopic feel. Despite the fact that Margaret is forced to accept that 'there never was a cord of darkness, never a place in which our spirits touched. There was only my longing',<sup>179</sup> intimatopic ideologies are clearly reflected in a text of moderated eroticism which connects love and friendship, encodes intimacy as erotic, and expresses a desire for unity, reciprocity and exclusivity. It is also of note that, whilst many could not be considered part of the intimatopic genre, a great number of texts contain

<sup>175</sup> Mary Renault, *The Bull from the Sea*, (London: Penguin, 1973), p.126.

<sup>176</sup> Renault, *The Bull from the Sea*, p.163.

<sup>177</sup> Cranny-Francis, 'Different Identities, Different Voices', p.254.

<sup>178</sup> Sarah Waters, *Affinity* (London: Virago, 2000), p.285.

<sup>179</sup> Waters, *Affinity*, p.348.

intimatopic moments that are peripheral to the main focus and intimatopic ideologies appear briefly in sometimes surprising places. For instance, as Rosalind Coward points out in pop songs,<sup>180</sup> which often depict mental unity, reciprocity, exclusivity and, probably as a result of their public nature, moderated eroticism. Although I have not found space for it in this thesis it would be interesting and profitable to explore the ways in which heterosexual, heterosocial, female homosocial and lesbian texts as well as popular culture reflect intimatopic ideologies.

### And Finally

It is clear that intimatopia is driven by its ideological commitment to intimacy, a commitment which is central to a dispersed interpretative community which produces texts encoded in the context of their feminine ideologies. These ideologies, perhaps derived from a generally feminine psychology are, particularly when applied to relationships between men, distinctive and in order to elucidate them I had to break away from both queer and heteronormative critical orthodoxies. I have distanced myself from the queer perspective by refusing to sexualise ambiguous texts or their sources and by insisting that intimatopic texts do not reflect queer ideologies. I have distanced myself from heteronormative approaches by focusing on intimacy and same sex relationships, refusing to describe eroticism as 'a foreign body forcibly imposed on the' text.<sup>181</sup> Perhaps it is because it falls between the purviews of these two camps that intimacy in literature has been so neglected. Certainly the centrality of intimacy insisted upon by the intimatopic genre is uncommon in our current literary and cultural scene. Intimacy with all its ambiguity may be culturally threatening because it is difficult to classify and as Dollimore suggests 'the adjacent becomes threatening in a way that the excluded never quite does'.<sup>182</sup> Sexual intimatopias often refuse to frame the intimacy they encode in terms of an 'excluded'

<sup>180</sup> Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire* (London: Paladin, 1984), p.148.

<sup>181</sup> Vincent Quinn, 'Loose Reading? Sedgwick, Austen and Critical Practice', *Textual Practice*, 14 (2000), 305-326 (p.306).

<sup>182</sup> Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, p.52.

homosexuality but instead encode relationships between men in the more familiar terms of intimacy. For some readers the sexual intimatopic text's suggestion that the social experiences they may be familiar with are connected to erotic experiences that may be alien territory, could prove extremely disconcerting. Even the connections made by the ambiguous text may be threatening, because the eroticism it encodes has escaped the containment provided by the category of 'homosexual'. Alan Sinfield claims that 'dissidence is least threatening when it can be seen to be respecting boundaries'<sup>183</sup> that is, when it can be comfortably categorised, and certainly George Haggerty feels that ambiguous texts like those by Anne Rice, 'threaten' to 'expose the erotic basis of male-male relations in culture,'<sup>184</sup> threatening to breach existing boundaries. I have, somewhat unusually, insisted upon using the same term to categorise both sexual and nonsexual texts, because, I believe, both these types of intimatopic text share a distinctive constellation of ideologies and textual features. I wonder however if this has been a dangerous move and I hope that the term intimatopic, will not like the term romantic friendship, come to imply the sexual in the ambiguous. This possibility is one which ignores intimatopic ideologies and attempts to negotiate the threat of the intimate by explaining intimacy as sexual. Interpretations of ambiguous intimatopic texts as sexual demonstrate that what our 'culture finally represses' is 'not sexual desire, but love,'<sup>185</sup> for, 'love is obscene precisely because it puts the sentimental in place of the sexual'.<sup>186</sup> Almost one hundred years ago, Edward Carpenter wrote of his hope that what he termed 'friendship-love', an intimate relationship that may or may not be sexual, would 'arise again and become a recognized factor of modern life'.<sup>187</sup> Carpenter did not live to see such a resurgence but perhaps intimatopic ideologies will have an increasing cultural influence. Intimatopia is fighting against our 'theoretical predilections which fail to recognise [...]friendship as a fundamental

<sup>183</sup> Sinfield, *Cultural politics*, p.64.

<sup>184</sup> George E. Haggerty, 'Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 32 (1998), 5-18 (p.13). Emphasis mine.

<sup>185</sup> Haggerty, 'Anne Rice', p.15.

<sup>186</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lovers Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (Jonathan Cape: London, 1979), p.178.

<sup>187</sup> *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship* ed. by Edward Carpenter, (Swan Sonnenschein and Co.: London 1902; New York: Pagen Press, 1982) p.189.

human motive',<sup>188</sup> and commenting on the place of intimacy in society. The ambiguous texts insisting on recognition of the close but non-sexual friendships that Vicky Bertram feels the English language lacks a term for,<sup>189</sup> and the sexual texts insisting that love, intimacy and friendship are fundamental to erotic relationships. Du Plessius characterized women's fiction as aiming to 'transform hegemonic society and the tales it tells'<sup>190</sup> and, although not always from a self consciously political perspective, intimatopic texts are offering new tales which may, who knows, lead to transformation.

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<sup>188</sup> Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time 'Star Trek' in the American Mythos* (London: Praeger, 1998), p.108.

<sup>189</sup> Vicky Bertram, 'Problems with (Girl)friends? Contemporary Women Poets and Tensions in Female Friendship', in *Celebrating Women's Friendship: Past Present and Future*, ed. by Ruth A. Symes, Ann Kaloski and Heloise Brown (York: Raw Nerve Books, 1999), pp.181-214 (p.181).

<sup>190</sup> DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, p.122.

**Appendix One**  
**Survey of K/S fiction writers and Readers**

What follows is the survey undertaken amongst attendees at British and American K/S Conventions held in March 2004 (US) and August 2004 (UK). The Survey was distributed as part of the convention package and was returned to me either in person or by post. First I include the survey as given to the attendees and following that I reproduce the survey again, but include the results. TOS = *Star Trek: The Original Series*.

**Part One**  
**Subjectivity and Slash**

- 1. Before you read K/S did you read other male/male romance fiction (e.g. Mary Renault's *The Charioteer*, Mel Keegan's *East Wind Blowing* and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Catch Trap*)?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes: Please tell me if any books/writers were particular favourites?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If No: would you be interested in reading such books now?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you read any such books since being interested in K/S, if so which ones are favourites?</li> </ul>

- 2. Kirk and Spock as you see them in TOS: Please tick the statement which most reflects the way you understand TOS when you watch it on screen.**

Kirk and Spock are lovers in TOS, even though of course we never see them at it!	
Kirk and Spock are just friends in TOS, although I think they would make a great couple!	
Kirk and Spock are in love in TOS, they just haven't admitted it to each other yet.	

- 3. Can you give any concrete examples from TOS which makes you think it's 'slashy'?**



**4. Please rate the following from 1-5 for their importance to your understanding of TOS as slashy.**

*1= I do **not** think this makes TOS seem slashy to me, 5= This element definitely makes TOS seem slashy to me.*

It's because Kirk and Spock are emotionally dependent upon one another.	
It's because Kirk and Spock work closely together.	
It's because Kirk and Spock exchange casual touches.	
It's because they stand so close.	
It's because they are always together.	
It's because they seem jealous of each others other relationships.	
It's because they are very close friends.	
It's because their greatest commitments seem to be to each other.	
It's because the mind meld gives them a way of sharing feelings.	
It's because Kirk and Spock rely on each other personally.	
It's because Kirk and Spock must rely on each other professionally.	
It's because we see Kirk without his shirt on a lot.	
It's because Kirk and Spock hold eye contact at lot.	
It's because Kirk and Spock share their emotions and feelings.	
It's because neither Kirk nor Spock have a steady girlfriend/ wife.	
It's because they always end up together at the end of a show despite temporary amorous interests elsewhere.	

**5. Please rate the following from 1-5 for their importance to you when reading a K/S story.**

*1= **not** very important and 5=very important*

Emotional Sharing.	
Descriptions of how Kirk and Spock work together to solve a problem.	
Images of oneness – such as, but not limited to, the mind meld.	
An exploration of the power structures between Kirk and Spock.	
Depiction of the friendship that Kirk and Spock share.	
Physical or emotional suffering.	
Sex that is tender.	
An exploration of how their friendship or working relationship develops into love.	
Elements which show how Kirk and Spock are dependant on each other.	
Sex that is emotional.	
The depiction of an ideal relationship – at least by the end of the story.	
Sex that is passionate.	
At least one sex scene.	
Expression of feelings.	
The depiction of equality between Kirk and Spock in their love relationship.	
Some acknowledgement of their professional lives together.	

## Part Two

### Decoding Desire

1. I think that K/S at its best is....

a fairly faithful representation of Kirk and Spock as I see them on screen.	
A slight manipulation of Kirk and Spock as I see them on screen.	
A total break with the Kirk and Spock I see on screen.	

2. Kirk and Spock as I personally see them on TOS are...

Lovers.	
In love but not lovers.	
One is in love with the other but not visa versa.	
Very close friends.	

3. I think Kirk and Spock were intended by the creators of Trek to be...

Lovers.	
In love but not lovers.	
One is in love with the other but not visa versa.	
Very close friends.	

4. I write/read K/S because...

It is a satisfying reflection of the Kirk and Spock I see on screen, K/S is pleasing because it highlights something that is already in Trek.	
I want to see Kirk and Spock do these things and they can't on screen, I can manipulate them in K/S.	
I enjoy being able to write/read an alternative version of the Kirk and Spock I see on screen.	
Its sexy, it doesn't matter to me what they did/didn't do on screen, K/S is a totally different issue.	
None of the above	

5. Last question! I was inspired to write/read K/S because...

I watched TOS.	
I read a K/S story.	
I'd heard of K/S.	
I'd heard of slash.	
None of the above.	

## Results

These results are taken from 30 completed surveys. For the most part I have opted to simply record the numbers of responses in each category. For the rated categories, I have record the average response. I have altered the format slightly for ease of reading.

### Part One

#### Subjectivity and Slash

Before you read K/S did you read other male/male romance fiction (e.g. Mary Renault's <i>The Charioteer</i> , Mel Keegan's <i>East Wind Blowing</i> and Marion Zimmer Bradley's <i>The Catch Trap</i> )?	Yes: 8
	No: 22
If yes: Please tell me if any books/writers were particular favourites?	
Mary Renault	8
Marion Zimmer Bradley	1
Armistead Maupin	1
If No: would you be interested in reading such books now?	Yes: 22
	No: 8
Have you read any such books since being interested in K/S?	Yes: 20
	No: 10
If Yes: which ones are favourites?	
Mary Renault	5
Anne Rice	2
Marion Zimmer Bradley	2
Mel Keegan	2
Patricia Nell Warren	4
Ellen Kushner	1
Lynn Flewelling	1
Alan Hollinghurst	1
Diane Duane	1
Poppy Z. Brite	1

<b>Kirk and Spock as you see them in TOS: Please tick the statement which most reflects the way you understand TOS when you watch it on screen.</b>	
Kirk and Spock are lovers in TOS, even though of course we never see them at it!	8
Kirk and Spock are just friends in TOS, although I think they would make a great couple!	0
Kirk and Spock are in love in TOS, they just haven't admitted it to each other yet.	19

Can you give any concrete examples from TOS which makes you think it's 'slashy'?

- The backrub scene in 'Shore Leave'.
- When McCoy confronts Spock about his emotions (in the cell) and feelings for Kirk in 'Patterns of Force'.
- The last scene in 'Galileo 7' when Kirk is positively **flirting** with Spock about his stubbornness.
- The elevator scene in 'And the Children Shall Lead'.
- When Kirk says to Spock, 'It gives me emotional security'.
- When the Squire of Gotho's was pointing gun (or something) at Spock saying he'd kill what Kirk valued most.
- End of 'Amok Time' - of course!
- Getting dressed together in 'The City on the Edge of Forever'...They've done that before!
- In the Cell in the Nazi themed episode.
- The way they can't take their hands off each other in 'The Changeling'.
- Spock reaching out against his better judgement in 'The Tholian Web' - Phew!
- Many: Kirk and Spock touch each other a lot even though Vulcan's supposedly don't like being touched - except by their intimates. Kirk is clearly an intimate to Spock. It's a lot of handling! Check out: The scene from 'The Changeling' when Kirk is holding Spock, The scene from 'Shore Leave' when Spock is trying to protect Kirk while they are both running from tiger and shooting plane. Eye contact - long knowing looks conveying an intimacy they don't share with others, they do it **often** probably a few times each episode.
- Kirk's comments about Spock giving him 'emotional security'.
- Spock holding Janice Lester's/Kirk's hand in 'Turnabout Intruder'.
- Kirk's comment to Garth that Spock is his 'brother'.
- Spock grabbing Kirk at the end of 'Amok Time'. Spock saying 'forget' to Kirk as he mind melds with him while he's sleeping at the end of 'Requiem for Methuselah'.
- All of *Star Trek III*, death scene in *Star Trek II*.
- The extreme concern when the other is in danger.
- The intimacy implied in the devotion between captain and first officer.
- The way the **look** at each other.
- The eye contact in almost every episode, the little brush ups against each other.
- Particularly the scene in 'Requiem for Methuselah' when McCoy has just said Spock doesn't know how to love, isn't capable of love and Spock performs the mind meld showing he does!
- Spock gets out of Pon Farr by thinking he killed Kirk and then loses complete emotional control when he finds him alive.
- When running from the plane in 'Shore Leave' their hands are all over each other.
- In 'The Changeling', after Kirk breaks the hold Nomad has on Spock's mind, he appears reluctant to keep his hands off him.

- 'Requiem for Methuselah' - Final scene.
- 'Turnabout Intruder', the mind meld between Spock and Kirk in the body of Janice Lester.
- In 'Requiem for Methuselah' when Spock does an unauthorised mind meld on Kirk.
- In 'Turnabout Intruder' when Spock caresses Kirk's neck in brig while Kirk is in Janice Lester's body - when they hold hands Spock knows the woman is really Kirk yet holds hands with him/her anyway.
- That smile in 'Amok Time' when Spock sees that Kirk is alive.
- There's something in every episode.
- Actually no, but there are numerous scenes where you can pretend they are feeling something more than friendship.

<b>Please rate the following from 1-5 for their importance to your understanding of TOS as slashy.</b> <i>1= I do <b>not</b> think this makes TOS seem slashy to me, 5= This element definitely makes TOS seem slashy to me.</i>	
It's because Kirk and Spock are emotionally dependent upon one another.	4.28
It's because Kirk and Spock work closely together.	2.70
It's because Kirk and Spock exchange casual touches.	3.85
It's because they stand so close.	3.81
It's because they are always together.	3.51
It's because they seem jealous of each others other relationships.	3.92
It's because they are very close friends.	3.50
It's because their greatest commitments seem to be to each other.	4.61
It's because the mind meld gives them a way of sharing feelings.	3.87
It's because Kirk and Spock rely on each other personally.	4.04
It's because Kirk and Spock must rely on each other professionally.	2.85
It's because we see Kirk without his shirt on a lot.	2.19
It's because Kirk and Spock hold eye contact at lot.	4.21
It's because Kirk and Spock share their emotions and feelings.	4.03
It's because neither Kirk nor Spock have a steady girlfriend/ wife.	3.06
It's because they always end up together at the end of a show despite temporary amorous interests elsewhere.	3.66



<b>Please rate the following from 1-5 for their importance to you when reading a K/S story.</b> <i>1 = not very important and 5 = very important</i>	
Emotional Sharing.	4.39
Descriptions of how Kirk and Spock work together to solve a problem.	3.53
Images of oneness – such as, but not limited to, the mind meld.	3.82
An exploration of the power structures between Kirk and Spock.	2.96
Depiction of the friendship that Kirk and Spock share.	4.06
Physical or emotional suffering.	2.78
Sex that is tender.	3.89
An exploration of how their friendship or working relationship develops into love.	4.27
Elements which show how Kirk and Spock are dependant on each other.	3.92
Sex that is emotional.	4.00
The depiction of an ideal relationship – at least by the end of the story.	3.71
Sex that is passionate.	3.90
At least one sex scene.	3.14
Expression of feelings.	4.14
The depiction of equality between Kirk and Spock in their love relationship.	4.10
Some acknowledgement of their professional lives together.	3.84

## **Part Two** **Decoding Desire**

<b>I think that K/S at its best is....</b>	
A fairly faithful representation of Kirk and Spock as I see them on screen.	13
A slight manipulation of Kirk and Spock as I see them on screen.	13
A total break with the Kirk and Spock I see on screen.	1

<b>Kirk and Spock as I personally see them on TOS are...</b>	
Lovers.	7
In love but not lovers.	16
One is in love with the other but not visa versa.	1
Very close friends.	3

<b>I think Kirk and Spock were intended by the creators of Trek to be...</b>	
Lovers.	0
In love but not lovers.	7
One is in love with the other but not visa versa.	1
Very close friends.	19

<b>I write/read K/S because...</b>	
It is a satisfying reflection of the Kirk and Spock I see on screen, K/S is pleasing because it highlights something that is already in Trek.	15
I want to see Kirk and Spock do these things and they can't on screen, I can manipulate them in K/S.	10
I enjoy being able to write/read an alternative version of the Kirk and Spock I see on screen.	4
Its sexy, it doesn't matter to me what they did/didn't do on screen, K/S is a totally different issue.	1
None of the above.	0

<b>I was inspired to write/read K/S because...</b>	
I watched TOS.	11
I read a K/S story.	9
I'd heard of K/S.	7
I'd heard of slash.	0
None of the above.	3

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### Un-credited Web Pages

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- Details about the history of K/S fandom can be found at  
<<http://www.beyonddreamspress.com/database.htm>>
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